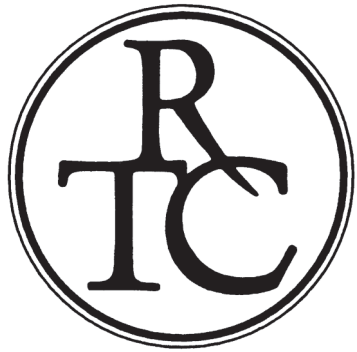

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REMAINING FRESH AND FAITHFUL IN THE ELDERSHIP

A Challenge to Encourage and Motivate

Robert L. W. McCollum

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Difficulties and problems arise in every 'calling' because we live in a fallen world. We live in a world affected by the curse pronounced by God after the rebellion of Adam and Eve. The 'thorns and thistles' often combine to frustrate in fulfilling goals or achieving targets. The Christian not only has to contend with the 'thorns and thistles' but also with the opposition of the evil one and his emissaries as he faithfully follows Jesus Christ, his Lord and Master. And if that is true of the Christian in general it is especially true of the Christian leader, be he a teaching or a ruling elder. His work involves giving leadership to the members of the congregation. As he does so, he will often find himself targeted by Satan. His strategy is to wound and cripple pastors, the shepherds, that he might more easily scatter the flock.

God spoke through the prophet Ezekiel against shepherds who had lost sight of their calling. Instead of caring for the sheep they had become self centred and self indulgent. As a consequence the flock suffered.

> ... Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? They eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep.... So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them. [1.]

Elders, newly ordained to the pastoral care of God's people, will often approach the task with enthusiasm and vigour but, after a few major disappointments and some major difficulties, that enthusiasm can begin to wane and contentment with mediocrity can settle in. How can elders, teaching and ruling, be better prepared for their calling to serve as under-shepherds of the chief shepherd Jesus Christ?

They should know from the outset that they are engaged in a war. Two

kingdoms are in conflict. The kingdom of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of the prince of this world, Satan. Most of the skirmishes in this war never hit the headlines but increasingly they do. In England a Christian couple were prosecuted and found guilty of discriminating against a same-sex couple who requested accommodation in their Bed and Breakfast. In Northern Ireland a Christian bakery, Ashers, has been before the Courts and found guilty of discrimination for refusing to print a slogan on a cake promoting same-sex marriage. In Belfast a preacher has been charged with a 'hate crime' because of remarks he made against Islam.

In the West we are living in what has often been described as a post-Christian society. We therefore should not think it strange to be facing opposition. Jesus warned his disciples that,

> If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own, but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. [2]

Throughout the centuries Christians have suffered many trials because of their love and loyalty to Jesus Christ. It is reckoned that more Christians experienced martyrdom in the 20th century than in all the previous centuries combined. Christians cannot expect the 21st century to be any different. There is a war on. The kingdom of God is advancing, but Satan's kingdom is constantly seeking to halt its progress and, if it were possible, to destroy it. In this spiritual war elders are on the front line. They will often be exposed to Satan's attack. What will enable them, not only to stand their ground when he attacks, but to press on, persevering when meeting disappointment or difficulty? The simple answer is 'the grace of Christ'. But God uses means - the Word, the sacraments and prayer. In these three means of grace Christ is preeminent. He is the Living Word, the sacraments are centred on him and prayer is offered through him to the Father.

With respect to the spiritual war in which Christians are engaged Jesus Christ is the Commander. It is therefore incumbent that those under his command should keep their eyes fixed on him which is the primary challenge of Hebrews 12:2, 'looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.' Verse 3 begins, 'Consider him'. That is the great theme running through Hebrews. 'Consider Jesus', who is superior to Angels, Moses and Aaron. 'Consider Jesus', who fulfilled the sacrifices and ceremonial of the Old Testament administration. And then having referred to Jesus the writer instructs his readers to look at Christ's life of faith as a challenge and as an encouragement. This article will seek to develop this theme and consider its implications.

Jesus - The Trailblazer of Faith

How do the familiar words of Hebrews 12:2, 3 relate to the context in which they are found, i.e. the Epistle to the Hebrews? The author was writing to Hebrew Christians who were wavering with respect to faith. They were in grave danger of drifting from their spiritual moorings. They were contemplating shrinking back from their attachment to Jesus Christ and going back to the rites and rituals of 1st century Judaism.

When these Jews had accepted Jesus of Nazareth as the long awaited Messiah they no doubt had hoped that there would be a general acceptance of him by all the Jews. But that was not the case. The majority of the Jews not only rejected Jesus as the Messiah, but they turned on those who did, those who no longer went to the synagogue worship, those who no longer attended the festive celebrations in the Temple. And that opposition quickly became violent and oppressive. Evidence of this is found in chapter 10 verse 32, 'you endured a hard struggle with sufferings', and in verse 33, 'sometimes being exposed to reproach and affliction and sometimes being partners of those so treated. Also in verse 34, 'you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property. Some were also imprisoned, all for the sake of accepting Jesus as the Messiah. These Christian Jews didn't think it was going to be like that and so now their faith was flagging. To help them the writer defined 'faith' for his readers in Hebrews 11:1, 'Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen'. Then he reminded them of the great heroes and heroines of the faith in their own history who had 'endured' all kinds of trouble, 'as seeing him who is invisible.' (Hebrews 11:27). After referring to that great cloud of witnesses he pointed them to Jesus Christ - the greatest example of faith. As one writer has put it,

> ... the incarnate son is himself the man of faith par excellence, and this seems to be the primary sense intended by the Greek original which reads literally, 'the pioneer and perfecter of faith.' [3.]

The earlier witnesses recorded in Hebrews 11 supply incentive in abundance but in Jesus we have one who is supremely, the faithful witness. Followers of Christ, be they in leadership or not, ought always to remember that they are called to a life of faith. Habakkuk the prophet, as quoted by Paul in Romans 1:17 declared, 'The righteous shall live by faith'. In other words the people of God are called to live each day exercising faith in the Lord their God. And in relation to what that faith looks like in practice Jesus is the supreme example being described here as 'the founder and perfecter of our faith.'

In the Greek text it is the definite article 'the' that is present, not the possessive pronoun 'our'. That means the text should read – 'Jesus the founder and perfecter of *the* faith'. In English the definite article is often not translated

and so our text would read, 'Jesus the founder and perfecter of faith'. At this point consideration is being given to Jesus as the founder *of faith*. Sometimes the Greek word for 'founder' is translated 'pioneer', a word which better conveys the sense of the original. As a pioneer of faith Jesus goes ahead, he opens up the way, he establishes the pattern of faith to follow. He gives the template for the life of faith. The word 'trailblazer', in a very graphic way, captures this meaning. Jesus is therefore presented as the one who has blazed the trail of faith and as the one who himself ran the race of faith to its triumphant finish.[4.] Jesus provides the best example and incentive in running the race of faith, better than all who went before him, better than Abraham, or Moses or David. In reality of course they were not before him for, as the eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ was before all things.

> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [5.]

That is why Moses could endure in the life of faith 'as seeing Him who is invisible'. In that sense Jesus is the pioneer, the pathfinder, the trailblazer of faith.

We see his faith constantly being expressed in the Psalms. Although King David wrote most of the Psalms, he, as Israel's king, was a type of the coming King, Jesus Christ. This means that in the Psalms the life of David fades into the background and it is the life of Christ that predominates. This means that the principle voice that we hear in the Book of Psalms, according to Michael Lefebvre, is that of Jesus.

> The Psalms also include portions addressed to Christ and many lines about him. But in all the Psalms (and only in the Psalms) we have words of Christ to sing *with* him. Finding Jesus in the Psalms is not simply about the prophecies of his work in this line or in that line. We find Jesus in the Psalms by hearing his voice leading our praise in every line.[6.]

Recognising the validity of Lefebvre's conclusion, Christ is seen speaking in many of the Psalms about his faith. At the beginning of his life he is 'trusting'. 'You made me trust you at my mother's breasts'. (Psalm 22:9). When surrounded by enemies on every side Jesus was constantly looking to his Father. 'When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid.' (Psalm 56:3, 4). Then on the cross, at the moment of his extremity, at the height of his suffering, faith shone forth brilliantly. 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Psalm 22:1). The feeling of abandonment pressed in upon his soul but faith was still triumphant. He cried, 'My God, my God'. Faith in his Father saw him through those dark

and difficult hours. Then when he was about to breathe his last faith found expression in the words of Psalm 31:5, 'Father into your hands I commit my spirit'. Peter made reference to the faith of his Master in 1 Peter 2:23, 'When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued *entrusting* himself to him who judges justly.'

Not only was Jesus the trailblazer of faith, but in him faith was expressed in perfection. That is why in Hebrews 12:2 He is described as the 'perfecter of faith' or 'the perfection of faith'. Jesus is not always thought about as an example of faith, because often insufficient focus is given to his humanity. At Christ's incarnation the holy Son of God took to himself man. He became flesh. As the perfect man he lived the perfect life of faith, never doubting for a moment the care and provision of his Father. His followers can never say that their faith is perfect. Often it can become jaded. Often it begins to flag. Like these Hebrew Christians believers can drift from their spiritual moorings. Their commitment to the cause of Christ and the extension of his kingdom can begin to wane. Sadly it can be true of some men in the Christian ministry that although they began well they finish badly. An explanation for that has to be found. There are many reasons. But when what happened to Peter on the Sea of Galilee is recalled, the moment when he took his eyes off Christ and looked to the wind, he became afraid and began to sink. Believers always need to be considering him, keeping their spiritual eyes continually focused on Christ, the trailblazer and the perfection of faith and that will keep them from sinking spiritually when confronted with the trials and storms of life.

Jesus - The Perseverer in Faith

These Hebrew Christians had professed the faith. They believed in Jesus as their Saviour and they were following him as their King. But then life became difficult. Their fellow Jews turned on them, oppressed them and persecuted them. They hadn't thought it was going to be so tough. Their faith was beginning to flounder in the face of adversity. That has also been the experience of many down through the years. Many men when ordained to the Christian ministry or the eldership were bright-eyed, eager, filled with enthusiasm, having a zest for the work. They were zealous Christians, keen to grow and develop to be the best minister or elder that they could be for Christ. But then difficulties arose from unexpected people. Disappointment after disappointment often leads to discouragement, and even to thoughts of resignation. They didn't think it was going to be like that. But, bearing in mind the teaching and experiences of Jesus, had they any right to think it would be any different?

Jesus in his public ministry faced many disappointments and yet his faith never flagged. After one of his sermons he faced criticism. 'When many of his

disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"' (John 6:60). Jesus knew that they were grumbling, even though they were doing it behind his back. He said, 'Do you take offense at this?' Jesus then gave words of explanation (verses 62-65). How did his listeners react? 'After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.' (John 6:66). Yet Jesus persevered. He never flinched. He never flagged. His faith never floundered even when the opposition reached a crescendo with the multitude crying out, 'Crucify, crucify him' (Luke 23:21).

Hebrews 12:3 captures Christ's endurance, the perseverance that was such a feature of his life of faith. 'Consider him who endured such hostility of sinners against himself'; and also the words of verse 2, 'who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.' Many men serve Christ faithfully and sacrificially in the ministry, giving it their best, giving many hours each week in pulpit preparation and out many nights on pastoral visitation. In the midst of such service attacks may come. One minister may be described as a man who doesn't care; another may be told that his sermons are too deep or too shallow or too close to the bone. When such attacks come time should be taken to reflect and pray about the pattern of ministry being followed. Consideration should be given as to whether adjustments need to be made, because no one is perfect. But never let faith flag. Don't be tempted to give up. 'Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself'. No one was misunderstood as much as the Saviour was misunderstood. No one was falsely accused as much as the Saviour. No one suffered as much as the Saviour suffered. On the cross the horrors of hell engulfed him; the torments of the Father's wrath fell on him. And yet his faith never languished; his faith never failed him, not for a second. Hebrews 12:2 is the only occasion 'the cross' is mentioned in the entire epistle. Commenting on its use Simon J. Kistemaker writes,

> That term, together with the verb *endured*, mirrors the entire passion narrative of Jesus' trial and death. Jesus stood alone during his trial before the high priest and before Pontius Pilate. Jesus endured the agony of Gethsemane alone. And he alone bore the wrath of God at Calvary. In his suffering Jesus visibly demonstrated his faith in God. In obedience he sustained the anguish of death on the cross[7].

The faith of the Hebrews had begun to flag because their Christian profession had invited some hostility. But in relation to what the founder and perfecter of faith experienced they had nothing to moan about. 'In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood'. (verse 4).

The writer in verse 2 identifies what had enabled Christ to endure: 'who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross'. Much debate has centred on the phrase 'who for the joy that was set before him'. Calvin points out that

the phrase 'for the joy' has the same meaning as 'in the place of the joy'.[8] He therefore, along with other scholars, concluded that Jesus chose death on the cross in place of the joy of heavenly bliss he enjoyed in the presence of God. Calvin nevertheless concedes that another interpretation of the text is entirely valid. 'If anyone thinks that the preposition [*anti*] denotes the final cause I do not greatly object, since the meaning would be that Christ did not refuse the death of the Cross because he saw its happy issue'.[9]

There is now a general consensus among Reformed scholars that this second interpretation is more consistent both with the immediate context of Hebrews and the wider context of other Scriptures. For example, David writing as a prophet, after referring to the sufferings of Christ in Psalm 16:11, makes reference to the 'fullness of joy' that the Suffering Servant would experience in the Father's presence after his Passion.[10] In 1 Peter the apostle makes reference to 'the prophets who...predicted the sufferings of Christ and the *subsequent glories*'.[11]

Since the joy that was before Christ in his exaltation and in his 'bringing many sons to glory' (Hebrews 2:10) enabled him in his human nature to endure, then likewise the joy that is before the believer will enable him to endure in adversity. In this article the primary focus is on ministers and elders in the church. They can often be the subject of Satan's attack. His objective is to discourage and destroy as Jesus warned. 'The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.' (John 10:10). Faithful servants of Christ will persevere, because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the promises of God's Word and the encouragement of many co-workers in the church. The primary source of encouragement of course comes from Jesus Christ who calls people to himself and sends them out in service. He is the Shepherd who goes before his sheep. He leads them through the valley of deep darkness so they are not overwhelmed with fear. To all His faithful servants he promises an eternal reward - a secure place in the Father's house. The apostle Peter, addressing faithful, dedicated, self-effacing elders pointed to the joy that is before them in glory. '[And] when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." (1 Peter 5:4).

It often pleases Christ to bless men with the privilege of seeing fruit for their many exertions carried out in his name. That is not always the case and it is faith in God and his Word that will keep men persevering in barren times. God has said, 'so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it'. (Isaiah 55:11). There is a temptation in Christian ministry to be constantly looking for appreciation and adulation. That will particularly be the case if the idol of self has not been cast out of the heart. If this idol is dominant in the heart it will want to be massaged, acknowledged, esteemed, admired and congratulated. And if such appreciation

is not forthcoming the temptation can be to resign and walk away from a Divine calling. In Christian service self has to be subordinated for the sake of Christ and his kingdom. Ministry of any description should be entered into, 'not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will, as to the Lord, and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord' (Ephesians 6 verses 6-8).

Jesus persevered, because he saw by faith what lay beyond the cross, but he also kept in constant contact with his Father. This is evident in all four accounts of the Saviour's life and ministry. It is summed up, not in these three verses from Hebrews 12, but in Hebrews 5:7, 'in the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of His reverence'.

Prayer is the lifeline of every believer. The work that elders are called to do is too awesome for any to carry out without Divine assistance. No wonder Paul cried out, 'Who is sufficient for these things?' (2 Corinthians 2:16). Then when he thought about it he informed the Corinthians, 'our sufficiency is from God' (2 Corinthians 3:5). Christ, in his human nature, knew his need of his Father's support and so he is seen turning frequently to his Father. Every believer needs to recognise this, especially teaching and ruling elders. Prayer is vital for spiritual health and vitality. Prayer is crucial to maintain focus and to gain the grace necessary to keep going productively in the service of King Jesus. Paul, having specified each item in the Christian's spiritual armour in Ephesians 6, undergirds them all with the vital necessity of prayer. 'Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel.' (Ephesians 6:17-19).

When Jesus arrived in Heaven, his mission accomplished, the Father greeted him with the words, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool. (Psalm 110:1). Jesus responded to his Father's welcome by saying to him, 'In your presence is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures for evermore'. (Psalm 16:11). 'Who for the joy that was set before him'. Jesus kept his eye on what lay beyond the cross and kept on going, enduring the cross, despising the shame associated with it, and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus the challenge to Faith

Kent and Barbara Hughes in their helpful and challenging book *Liberating ministry from the success syndrome* present the challenge, 'believe what you believe.'[12.] It is possible, they point out, to give verbal assent to the

great doctrines of the faith and yet to live in such a way as if they were not true. For example, God's works of providence, as revealed in the Bible, are summarised in the Shorter Catechism: 'God's works of providence are, his most holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions'.[13.] In a society which removes from its world view any concept of the supernatural and explains every eventuality in terms of 'chance' or 'luck', it can be very difficult to hold on to a world view which places God at the centre and the route cause of all that takes place. Everyone, however, who has made a profession of faith, is to believe what he believes. And that applies every bit as much to God's works of providence as to the substitutionary death of Christ upon the cross.

Jesus Christ, the founder and perfecter of faith, has blazed the trail for his people to follow. Never for a moment did he doubt the Divine Word; never for a second did he doubt the promises of his Father. In this respect Jesus' faith never faltered. He knew the Scriptures for they were 'within his heart'.[14.] In Psalm 16 he had the promise from his Father that he would not 'let your holy one see corruption.' Therefore Jesus could, with complete confidence, speak to his disciples about his resurrection on the third day. 'See we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of man will be delivered over to the chief priest and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day." (Matthew 20:18, 19).

Another illustration can be taken from the prayer life of Jesus. When Christians pray, doubts can assail their mind as to whether God actually listens, even though the Scriptures give the assurance that God is the One 'who hears prayer.' (Psalm 65:2). Jesus never had such doubts. By the grave of his friend Lazarus he was heard addressing his Father, '...Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me...' (John 11:41, 42). Jesus always 'believed what he believed'.

Conclusion

When considering Jesus, in his humanity, he is truly the founder and perfecter of faith or the pioneer and trailblazer of faith. Without faltering Jesus in his human nature lived the perfect life of faith. What an example he has given to his followers. The list of heroes and heroines of the faith listed in Hebrews 11 are all examples to stimulate, encourage and inspire. However, on close examination, each one of them had feet of clay. In Jesus Christ we have, as F.F. Bruce has it expressed so succinctly, 'the man of faith par excellence.' Ministers and elders and all God's people, by keeping their spiritual focus on Christ, will be given immense help to live the life of faith and by so doing will demonstrate to a watching world that 'they believe what they believe'.

Notes

1 Ezekiel 34:2b, 3, 5, 6.
2 John 15:18, 19.
3 P.E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews,* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p.522.
4 F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews,* (London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1971, p.351.
5 Colossians 1:15-17.
6 Michael Lefebvre, *Singing the Songs of Jesus: Revisiting the Psalms,* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2010), p.92.
7 Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary Hebrews,* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1984, p.369.
8 John Calvin*, Epistle to the Hebrews,* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) p.188.
9 John Calvin, op. cit., p.188.
10 Note Peter's use of this text on the day of Pentecost. Acts 2:25-28.
11 1 Peter 1:10, 11.
12 Kent and Barbara Hughes*, Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome,* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008) p.63.
13 Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 11.
14 Psalm 40:8.

A LITERARY-THEOLOGICAL READING OF REVELATION 19:1-10

Warren Peel

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The book of Revelation is much more than mere literature, but it is not less. Richard Bauckham writes,

> …Revelation can be seen to be not only one of the finest literary works in the New Testament, but also one of the greatest theological achievements of early Christianity. Moreover the literary and theological greatness are not separable.[1]

In this article we are following some of the methodology of J.L. Resseguie, who laid out the theory of a narrative-critical approach to the New Testament in his 2005 book *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*. This theory was worked out first in his earlier *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse* (1998), and then later applied and illustrated in *The Revelation of John, A Narrative Commentary* (2009). Resseguie notes two key features of narrative criticism: an emphasis upon the unity and coherence of the text as a world in itself, and close attention to detailed analysis of the words on the page, often referred to as 'close reading.' Resseguie describes this as

> the painstaking analysis of the nuances, ambiguities of words, images, metaphors, and small units of a text…[and] of the complex interrelation and *ambiguities* (multiple meanings) of the verbal and figurative components within a work.[2]

We want to apply Resseguie's methodology to one of the key passages of the Apocalypse: Revelation 19:1-10.

Structure

Revelation 19:1-10 stands as a kind of crossroads at the climax of the drama of the Apocalypse. 19:1-4 looks back to chapters 17 and 18 as heaven celebrates the destruction of Babylon, in accordance with the command of 18:20. There are numerous correspondences between the two sections: the three groups who lament the fall of Babylon in chapter 18 - kings (v.9-10), merchants

(v.11-17), and sailors (v.18-19) - are matched by the three groups in chapter 19 who celebrate her destruction and the vindication of the righteous - the two great multitudes (19:1-3,6-8), and the twenty-four elders and four living creatures (19:4). Their three songs (19:1-3,4,6-8) correspond to the three laments of 18:10,16-17,19. The three groups who lament Babylon's fall in chapter 18 are each said to be 'far off' (v.10,15,17) - they are separated spatially from the object of their lust. How different the song of the servants of God who had been separated from their betrothed and now at last will be joined to him forever when he arrives at last for the consummation of their wedding (19:7).

The contrast between chapters 18 and 19 is pointed up dramatically in the jump in decibels from 18:22ff. to 19:1ff. The vast city, seething with movement and bustle and the din of daily life, falls eerily still as it is enveloped in the silence of death. Then seer and reader alike leap as the roar of a great multitude blasts from heaven to earth.

Revelation 19:5-8 then looks ahead to the coming of the bridegroom (19:11-20.15), and the wedding of the Lamb, rejoicing in the consummation of God's purposes for his people about to unfold. In this way the introduction of the bride parallels the introduction of the harlot in 14:8 where the fall of Babylon the Great was suddenly and abruptly mentioned, even though it would not be explicitly described until chapter 18, nor indeed would Babylon be even mentioned again until 16:19. So too the bride is announced for the first time, somewhat unexpectedly, only to have her entrance delayed until 21.2.

Thus the passage serves as a bridge, concluding 17:1 – 18:24 and preparing for 21:9, but also linking the two visions.

The scene of John offering worship to the interpreting angel in 19:9-10 seems out of place, and the fact that it recurs again in 22:6-9 might make the reader think the narrator has blundered. It is unlikely, as most commentators recognise, that John is attacking a cult of angel worship in Asia Minor by recording these incidents. Richard Bauckham (following C.H. Giblin[3.]) has argued persuasively that the explanation is structural.[4.] The two repeated scenes (19:9-10 and 22:6-9) function as parallel conclusions to the two visions recorded in 17:1-19.10 and 21:9-22.9, which are also marked by closely parallel openings. These repetitions signal that we are meant to read the visions in relation to each other, as antithetical contrasts: on the one hand the downfall of the harlot, on the other the exaltation of the bride.

Content

The hymns of the book come to a climactic finale in this section. All the praise in Revelation has been loud (5:11-14, 7:10, 11:15, 12:10, 18:2), but this crescendo surpasses any of the descriptions of worship thus far: John hears a 'loud voice' (v.1) of a great multitude in heaven, but it is the noise of the second

choir in v.6 - the final 'hallelujah' of the Bible, the last hymn of praise - that John especially emphasizes, since its theme is not just the negative destruction of the wicked (God's 'strange work' as Luther called it) but the positive consummation of God's purposes for the universe in general and for his people in particular.

The most obvious verbal repetition in Revelation 19:1-10 is the fourfold 'hallelujah' that introduces the four hymns of the section. The repetition builds a crescendo of praise which contrasts powerfully with the repeated pronouncements of woe in the previous chapter.

The repetition of hallelujahs also emphasises the unity of the hymns of verses 1-5 and 6-8, which draw together the praise of the whole universe, heaven (1-5) and earth (6-8). The fourfold repetition is significant, since four in Revelation is often associated with the totality of earth and creation.

The use of 'hallelujah' is unexpected since, in spite of its frequent occurrence in the OT, this is the only place in the NT where it is found. This verbal link, combined with the hymnic form of the section, forges a strong intertextual link with those psalms which include the word 'hallelujah', especially the Hallel psalms (113-118) which were sung in thankful commemoration of God's deliverance of his people in the Exodus. The Exodus theme has been prominent throughout Revelation. Here again, as in 15:3-4, the people of God praise him for salvation from the enemy in language redolent of the Exodus. Darrell Johnson may be correct, moreover, when he notes the context in which the Hallel psalms were sung by Jesus (Matthew 26:30). 'Now "Hallelujah" is sung because a new meal is at hand - the feast that celebrates the greater deliverance won through the blood of the Lamb of God.'[5] Indeed the link is all the clearer since in Matthew 26:29 Jesus announces, 'I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.' He leaves the fourth cup in the Passover liturgy (of consummation) untouched, and they then sing a hallelujah song, anticipating the hallelujahs of Revelation 19 when the Lamb and his bride will drink the cup of consummation together at their wedding feast.

Also relevant is the use of 'hallelujah' in Psalms 146-150, where it frames each of the songs. The themes of these psalms find their ultimate fulfilment in the events described in Revelation 19: God's rescue of his oppressed people, frustrating the wicked (Psalm 146); the gathering of an exiled people and healing of their wounds, while the wicked are cast down (Psalm 147); the summons to the heavenly host and then the earth to give praise to the sovereign God, both great and small (Psalm 148), as in Revelation 19, where first heaven (v.1-4) then earth (v.6-8) praises God, both great and small (v.5); the rewarding of the righteous and celebration of the punishment of the wicked (Psalm 149); and the call to all creation, both in the heavenly sanctuary and everywhere to praise God (Psalm 150).

19:1-4: Praise to God for the fall of Babylon

A. The first hallelujah (v.1-2)

Our passage is set apart from what precedes it by the recurring phrase *meta tauta* ('after these things'), which always signals a new vision or, in this case, audition. 'These things' are the demise of Babylon, making explicit the connection between the praise of heaven and the destruction of the great prostitute.

What John hears is compared in a simile to 'the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven.' John has heard numerous 'loud voices' in the course of the narrative (*ph n megal* is used 19 times in Revelation), belonging to Jesus (1:10), angels (e.g. 5:2,12, 7:2), the redeemed in heaven (6:10), and an unidentified voice (12:10, 19:17). The combination here with *ochlou pollou en t i ouran i* ('of a great multitude in heaven') links it most closely with the redeemed before the throne in 7:9-10, the only other place in Revelation where we see an *ochlos polus* ('a great multitude').

Revelation 7:9-17 looks forward to a time after the saints have been safely brought through the tribulation of this present age (7:14). They stand before the throne dressed in white (symbolizing purity and victory), just as the bride, the church, is dressed in 'fine linen, bright and clean' (19:8) and holding palm branches (also associated with victory and joy, and carried around the Temple during the feast of Tabernacles, celebrating the completion of the harvest, commemorating the protection of God during the Exodus, and anticipating the consummation of the messianic age,[6] a consummation that has now come in 7:9 and 19:1-10).

H s t ria kai h doxa kai h dunamis tou theou h m n, 'Salvation and glory and power belong to our God' (God is always praised in triads or septets of attributes in Revelation) is very similar to the proclamation of the loud voice in heaven in 12:10, which issued forth when Satan was cast out of heaven at the resurrection and ascension of Christ. The connection between the two hymns is strikingly suggestive: the hurling down of Satan after the cross, resurrection, and ascension, celebrated in 12:10-12, anticipates the final casting down of Satan and his followers at the end (chapters 18-20) celebrated in very similar terms in 19:1-4.

But 12:10 does not just *foreshadow* the ultimate victory - it *accomplished* it. The victory over Satan *for all time* was won in principle in the cross and resurrection. Although the time between the defeat of Satan in 12:10 and his ultimate ruin described in 19:1-4 may seem long to the saints (6:10), it is in fact short (12:12) from the point of view of the heavenly throne room.

Two reasons for giving praise to God are now set forth in v.2. The first is a general statement of God's righteousness: *hoti al thinai kai dikaiai hai*

kriseis autou ('for his judgements are true and just'). We have heard this phrase twice before, with slight variations, in 15:3 and 16:7. Thus three times the truth and justice of God's judgments have been asserted as a reason for praise, first after, then during, then after the execution of that judgment.

The second reason for praise is a specific example of God's true and just judgments, described in a two-step progression where the second phrase elaborates on the first - God has punished the great prostitute, but his action is not merely negative; by so doing he has positively avenged the death of his servants (denoted by synecdoche as their 'blood'). He has punished her for what she did to the earth in general and for what she did to the church in particular.

The first ground of punishment (*h tis ephtheiren t n g n,* 'who corrupted the earth') echoes 11:18 (the first of several innertextual links to 11:15-19 in this passage), where the seventh trumpet announces that the time has come *diaphtheirai tous diaptheirontas t n g n* ('for destroying the destroyers of the earth'). Now this 'destruction' has come to pass (ch. 18) and is celebrated. There may be a double meaning in the use of *phtheir* ('to destroy'), which can mean both to ruin and to corrupt morally. Certainly Babylon has done both. Both references (11:18 and 19:2) allude to Jeremiah 51:25 (= 28:25, LXX) where the fall of historical Babylon was described using almost exactly the same phrase, foreshadowing the greater fall of latter-day, worldwide Babylon.[7]

Exedik sen to haima ('he has avenged the blood') recalls Revelation 6:10, the only other place in the Apocalypse where the verb occurs. Now the time of waiting (6:11) is over and their prayer is answered. In fact one can see the three series of seals, trumpets, and bowls, and now the destruction of Babylon, and the overthrow of the beast, false prophet, and Satan, as a direct answer to this prayer of 6:10.

B. The second hallelujah (v.3)

This reprise of the hallelujah by the same vast crowd adds great emphasis to their praise. The precise nature of Babylon's judgment is now described: eternal destruction. Rome's great boast was that she was *Roma aeterna.* Flavian coins bore the legend *aeternitas.* Could this be an ironic reference to this vaunted claim to eternity? Yes, Babylon will indeed endure forever - but not in the way she thinks or desires. This is the last time Babylon is referred to in the Apocalypse. 'Great Babylon' (14:8) goes into eternal ignominy and ruin.

Kapnos ('smoke') occurs twelve times in Revelation, usually as a visual sign of judgment. It is also used of the smoke of the incense of the prayers of the saints in 8:4 rising up before God. This liturgical language creates yet another connection between the prayers of the saints in 6.10 and the judgment of God on Babylon and all who follow her (14:11): we are meant to see the

eternal ruin of the city as the answer to the prayers of the saints. As Boring puts it,

> Even with all the language of judgment, the scene never ceases to be a worship scene. The smoke of Babylon that ascends "forever" is only a grisly contrast to the incense of the heavenly worship.[8]

There is an OT allusion in these words to the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:28) and to the desolation of Edom (Isaiah 34:10), both of which wicked oppressors of the people of God foreshadowed Babylon in their actions and in their fate.

C. The third hallelujah (v.4)

In a two-step progression which emphasizes their adoration, the elders and living creatures fall down and worship God who sits on the throne. Usually it is the twenty-four elders who fall down and worship. The only other place where both the elders and the living creatures fell down before God in worship was when the Lamb took the scroll from the right hand of God in 5:6-10.[9] The falling down of both groups together forms an *inclusio*, therefore, at the beginning and at the end of the unfolding of God's judgments upon the earth. It began with the opening of the seals and finished with the fall of Babylon. The first appearance of these beings was at the opening of the scroll (ch. 4-5); this is now their last appearance in Revelation, after the contents of the scroll have been executed.

They thus ratify the song of the multitude in v.1-3 with their own brief expression of praise. The combination 'Amen, Hallelujah' in v.4 is only found elsewhere in Psalm 106:48. The psalm is a retelling of the events of the Exodus, focusing on God's grace to a people who repeatedly gave themselves to idols. The psalm ends with the prayer that God would save and gather his people from the nations that they might give thanks to his name and glory in his praise. We see in Revelation 19:4 that the next time 'Amen, Hallelujah' is repeated in the Bible, that prayer is fulfilled.

The throne of God is perhaps the most important 'prop' in the Apocalypse. The word occurs 47 times and stands at the centre of the book. This is dramatically portrayed in chapter 4 by the position of the throne at the centre of the universe, radiating light and power and beauty, with the seven spirits of God before it, its transcendence signalled by the crystal sea, surrounded by concentric circles of innumerable worshippers. It represents by metonymy the sovereign power and rule of God over all creation. It is significant, too, that God is characterized as 'the One sitting on the throne.' This is John's favourite description of God (occurring 12 times). Resseguie comments,

> While lesser beings run to and fro, here and there, God sits…What appears as a passive activity in fact identifies the one who rules in this story. John's repeated reference to the one who sits on the throne emphasizes God's sovereignty.'[10.]

Over against Caesar's throne, which must have seemed almost invincible to Christians of the first century, Revelation presents God's throne in heaven, where the true Sovereign sits and rules.

D. The voice from the throne (v.5)

An unidentified voice speaks several times in Revelation. Although it comes from the throne here, it is unlikely to be the voice of God or Christ because the command is to praise 'our' God. The four living creatures are described as 'in the centre, around the throne' in 4:6, so one of these is probably the speaker. What the voice *says*, however, is more important than its owner. It issues a command that all God's people should praise him.

The complete number of the redeemed, whether in heaven or still on earth are specifically called to praise God here: *pantes hoi douloi autou* ('all his servants'). There is no reason why this cannot include the angelic host as well, who also fit the description (cf. v.10).

Each of the terms in this summons sets off innertextual echoes. The angel flying in mid-air proclaiming the eternal gospel summoned all who live on the earth to fear God, to give him glory, and to worship him. But the inhabitants of the earth do not fear God or give him glory. Instead, small and great alike, they serve the beast, fearing him and giving him worship (13:3-4,8,12,16). Now they have paid the price of fearing and worshipping the wrong person.

This threefold description of believers also echoes 11:18 where *douloi, phoboumenoi* and *hoi mikroi kai hoi megaloi* are also found. We shall see more innertextual links to 11:15-19 in v.6, leading us to the conclusion that Rev. 7:9-17, 11:15-19, and 19:1-8 are closely related.

19.5-8: Praise to God for the wedding of the Lamb

E. The fourth hallelujah (vv.6-8)

With the fourth hallelujah the focus of praise shifts from the negative to the positive, from destruction to consummation, from the harlot to the bride. Coming at the climax of the crescendo of praise, the content of this fourth hallelujah is to be regarded as of supreme importance. All through the Apocalypse judgment is never the end of the story, but spells salvation for the righteous. We see it in the seven oracles to the churches - after judgment, to those who overcome, reward. The pattern is proleptically depicted throughout

the various series of judgments (7:9ff., 11:15ff., 14:1-5, 15:2-4). And the large-scale structure of the whole book reflects this also, where the climax is not the overthrow of Babylon, the beast, the false prophet, and the dragon, but the new Jerusalem.

The fourth hallelujah is introduced with an impressive and emphatic threefold array of similes whose effect is to heighten the dramatic impact of Revelation's final song of praise. The triad emphasizes the noise: '[it] needs three similes to capture its deafening sound.'[11] John is not just stressing the volume of the song, however, but the significance of its content. As Prigent puts it,

> …the liturgical unfolding that is presented contains a deliberate progression: …Christians can very well sing the heavenly praises of God the judge who punishes the impious, but their song only achieves its fullness when it celebrates the lordship of God the savior.[12]

John uses anaphora in the repeated *h s ph n n* ('like the sound') at the beginning of each of the three phrases to build suspense and emphasis - what is this indescribable voice going to *say*? The verbal repetition also draws attention to the threefold nature of the description. The number three gives solemn, divine weight to what is about to be said; it sets it apart as special. '[The threefold comparison] is fittingly dramatic because of the enormous significance of its pronouncement.'[13]

Each of the three similes John uses makes an innertextual connection in Revelation:

- *h s ph n n ochlou pollou* ('like the sound of a great multitude') recalls, like 19:1, the great multitude in 7:9 standing before the throne - a vast ocean of innumerable voices.
- *kai h s ph n n hudat n poll n* ('like the sound of many waters') refers back to the inaugural vision of Christ in 1:15 and also the singing of the redeemed in 14:2 where they stood victorious with the Lamb on Mount Zion (best seen as a reference to heaven). The voice of the followers of the Lamb sounds like the voice of the Lamb himself, just as the voice of the beast from the land looked like a lamb but spoke like a dragon (13:11).
- *h s ph n n bront n ischur n* ('like the sound of mighty thunders'): the sound of thunder is a regular feature of Revelation, especially in connection with the throne and judgments of God (4:5, 6:1, 8:5, 11:19, 16:18). It is also found in the description of the song of the redeemed in 14:2. It is a picture of power and deafening noise. Unlike 14:2, however, the thunder is now plural. This may be a way of signaling the climax of

> the crescendo of the three similes, or it may be, as Lupieri suggests, a reflection of 'John's sense of the simultaneous multiplicity and individuality of the voice/voices…'[14.]

Taken together these three similes prepare us for an announcement of unusual solemnity and weight that relates to the judgment and power of God.

What then is the substance of this final hymn that needs to be introduced by such an impressive parade of powerful similes? Verses 6-8 give two main reasons for praise: (i) because God has begun to reign; (ii) because the wedding of the Lamb has come.

Two verbal repetitions in v.6 further connect Revelation 19:1-10 with the events of the seventh trumpet in 11:15-19. The declaration of the beginning of God's reign by the ingressive aorist *ebasileusen* 'he reigns' (v.6) is found conceptually in 11:15 and, almost verbatim, in 11:17 where the title *kurios ho theos ho pantokrat r* ('Lord God the Almighty') is also found, along with *ebasileusas* - the second person singular of the same kind of aorist as in 19:6.

These verbal links, especially taken together with the others noted above, suggest that Revelation 19:1-10 both recapitulates and progresses the action of the seventh trumpet. In chapter 11 the time had come for judgment and reward, but neither had at that point begun. In chapter 19 the judgment of Babylon is past, and the reward of the saints has begun to be experienced (in the downfall of Babylon). The destruction of the beast, the false prophet and the dragon are still to come, but that judgment is imminent - indeed it will be completed by the end of chapter 19. The coming of the kingdom of God is a double-edged reality - it means both judgment and blessing. Thus *ebasileusen* of v.6 is a last backward glance to the overthrow of Babylon in ch. 18 as well as a transition to the joy of the consummation about to be introduced. In that sense v.6b can be regarded as the hinge on which this Janus turns, for it encapsulates the thrust of the whole passage. God has begun to make manifest his reign before the universe, and so on one hand Satan's kingdom will now finally fall and on the other those who overcome will finally receive their reward.

It is hardly surprising that the title by which God should be described at this critical moment should be one of the seven occurrences of 'Lord God Almighty,' echoing as it does the OT *y^{e}hwah el h ts^{e}ba' th* and so describing God's unrivalled power and supremacy over history.[15.]

The second reason for praise is introduced in v.7a by another series of three terms with rhyming endings: *chair men kai agalli men kai d s men…* ('let us rejoice and exult and give'). The threefold repetition (again we see the number three associated with the divine) intensifies the call to praise contained in the three hortatory subjunctives and also highlights the second *hoti* ('because') clause as unusually significant. It serves to focus attention particularly on the second reason to praise God, namely the wedding of the

Lamb.

If we understand *all louia* in v.6 as equivalent to this threefold call to praise in v.7, there is both parallelism and progression in the two parts of this hymn. In both v.6b and vv.7-8a there is a call to praise followed by a reason for praise, but the second call to praise and the second reason for praise are more elaborate and expansive, suggesting that the emphasis is intended to fall there. As we have already noted above, the high point of the praise of God's servants is not for his judgment but his blessing, supremely realized in the wedding of the Lamb. The whole hymn is thus structured as a kind of two-step progression, where the second step clarifies the first. And indeed, as we shall see, the marriage of the Lamb to his bride is a direct outworking of the reign of God begun.

As far as the exact terms are concerned, there may be a deliberate intertextual link in the choice of *chair men kai agalli men* with Matthew 5:12, the only other NT occurrence of the two words together, especially since the context there is rejoicing because of the great reward promised by Jesus for those who are reviled and persecuted for his sake. As Mounce notes,[16] that reward is pictured here as a wedding feast. Perhaps it is not coincidental that the fourth of Revelation's seven beatitudes should be pronounced in v.9, following an allusion back to the Lord's beatitudes in Matthew 5. Prigent also notes an intertextual connection to the OT where 'this joy and rejoicing are of a markedly eschatological character, cf. Ps. 98:4; 118:24.'[17]

What then is the reason for such heightened rejoicing? *hoti lthen ho gamos tou arniou* ('for the marriage of the Lamb has come'). This is a strange and unexpected announcement. There are several places in Revelation where wedding imagery occurs, but nothing so far has prepared the readers for this particular image. Several commentators observe this. Aune writes, '…the notion of "the wife" of the Lamb is mentioned enigmatically but not further defined or described. The mention of a wedding at this point is entirely unexpected…'[18] but he has no suggestion as to why this should be. Witherington, on the other hand, sees the first occurrence of the image here as 'a clear sign that we are rapidly moving toward the climax of the book.'[19] In this insight we find a reason for the wedding announcement, for there is something suitably teleological about the union of the Lamb and his bride which brings to a fitting climax not just the trajectory which the Apocalypse has been following, but the whole biblical-theological storyline.

For the wedding of the Lamb is a natural, if not an immediately obvious, conclusion to the story of Revelation. It is hard to imagine a single metaphor that captures more completely the multi-faceted consummation of God's purposes for his people.[20] On one hand, as we have suggested above, this second *hoti* clause develops further the first in 19:6. As Thomas says,

> This is not a cause for praise that adds to the one expressed by the *hoti* clause of v.6, because the establishment of the kingdom of God and the marriage of the Lamb are in reality one event viewed from two perspectives.'[21.]

When God's reign is openly manifested and all opposition is quelled, what this means for his faithful servants is blessing, reward, and happiness. Other metaphors could convey this, but the image of a wedding also expresses the consummation of the deep and pure love of God for his people and his people for their Lord.

Moreover, as Boxall notes, the wedding of the Lamb follows naturally from the emphasis on sexual immorality and harlotry in the Babylon cycle.[22.] Indeed the theme begins even earlier, in the seven oracles to the churches (2:14,20-23). The people of God, symbolized by the 144,000 in 14:1-5, are the true followers of the Lamb who do not defile themselves with such spiritual adultery. In contrast to the kings of the earth who committed adultery with the great prostitute and the inhabitants of the earth who were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries (17:2, 18:3, 19:2), the servants of God are steadfastly faithful to their betrothed.

Furthermore, the wedding imagery here is the natural conclusion to the rich biblical-theological theme of the people of God as his bride, drawing together and bringing to a climax several ideas in the OT, early Judaism, and early Christianity.

1. The OT and early Jewish tradition of the Israel as a woman betrothed to Yahweh is found in many texts, especially the later prophets.[23.] Israel was expected to give unconditional love and loyalty to the Lord her husband, but repeatedly she failed to do so, and her idolatry was condemned as spiritual harlotry.

2. In the OT and early Judaism there was also a tradition of the marriage of the Messiah to Israel. Ps. 45 was often seen by the rabbis as relating to the future Messianic era. The Targum of Psalm 45 specifies that the King whose wedding is celebrated is the Messiah. Zimmermann's comparison of the motifs of the divine King, omnipotence, joy, glory, an adorned bride, wearing a bright garment, and righteousness/justice in Revelation 19:6-8 and Psalm 44 (LXX) shows compellingly 'proximity in both motif and language.'[24.]

3. The OT and early Jewish tradition of an eschatological banquet which had begun to gather Messianic associations[25.] is taken up in early Christianity and combined with the two strands above to produce the eschatological wedding feast of Christ and the church, found in Jesus'

> sayings about the bride and bridegroom (Matthew 22:1ff., 25:1ff.; Mark. 2:19-20; Luke. 14:15ff.; John. 3:29), and in Paul's metaphors of the church as the bride of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:23-32).[26.]

The imagery of the wedding of the Lamb here in Revelation draws on all three traditions, but also takes them further. Smalley comments,

> [John] not only portrays the perfection of believers through the imagery of the Lamb's wedding feast; he also develops this by means of an effective contrast which stems from the negative aspect of… Israel's wanton unfaithfulness. On the one hand is the city of systemic evil, which seduces the world with ostentation and deceives it with idolatry (14.8; 17.1-6; 18.2-10); on the other is the community of faithful redeemed, properly clothed in fine linen and waiting obediently to be united with her exalted Lord (3.20; 21.2,9; 22.17).[27.]

The great danger that Revelation warns against is that of being seduced by the great prostitute to commit idolatry which is spiritual adultery. So the antithetical alternatives serve the rhetorical purpose of the book. As Resseguie puts it,

> The imagery of the wedding on the one hand, and the illicit affair with the whore on the other, accentuate the two choices of the Apocalypse: to follow the Lamb and to participate in the Lamb's wedding feast, or to follow the beast and Babylon.[28.]

The metaphor of the arrival of the wedding is particularly effective in the context of the purpose of Revelation. In the culture of John's day, betrothal was followed by a period of delay during which time the bride would prepare herself for her wedding. This delay was brought to an end by the arrival of the bridegroom to bring the bride to his home in a procession, when the wedding feast would be celebrated. The great problem for John's readers was the delay in God's consummation of his purposes. It was this delay in bringing judgment on the forces of the dragon that made life so difficult for the seven churches (2:2-3,9-10,13,19,25, 3:4,8-10, and especially 6:10), it was this delay which necessitated the many calls to perseverance and endurance throughout the book. This period of delay, when evil appears to triumph and righteousness seems to be in retreat, explains the alternating presentation of the judgments of God upon the wicked and the future glory in store for the saints. The wedding metaphor explains this present distress - it is the time while the bride waits for the bridegroom to arrive.[29.]

The metaphor continues in vv.7b-8a. The vehicle here describes how the bride is occupied during the delay - what the church is doing while she waits for the parousia. Just as a bride made herself ready for her wedding, so the church spends the time since Christ's ascension preparing herself for his return.

The verbal thread *hetoimaz* ('to prepare') occurs seven times in Revelation. Prigent notes that 'it always indicates that the plan of God… will suffer neither improvisation nor delay.'[30.] So here it signals that the God's purposes for the church have been fulfilled. What this preparation comprises is elucidated by the second sentence in what is a two-step progression: *kai edoth aut i hina peribal tai bussinon lampron katharon* ('it was granted to her to clothe herself with fine line, bright and pure').

The woman's simple attire is a prop that contrasts pointedly with the gaudy, ostentatious dress of the harlot (17:4, 18:16). Interestingly the harlot wears fine linen too (18:16) - in some ways she resembles the bride, just as the beast from the land resembles the Lamb in superficial ways (13:11), but the effect is corrupted. Conversely the bride in her full glory is adorned with jewels (21:9-21), but they enhance her beauty, whereas they emphasize the whore's vulgarity. Any superficial similarity between the clothing of the two women is far outweighed by the expressly stated differences however:

- The bride's linen is *lampron katharon* ('bright and pure'). This recalls the attire of the seven angels in 15:6 - it is the dress of those fit to stand in the presence of God. The outward appearance of the bride 'describes the essence of the bride - her faithfulness, purity, and closeness to God.'[31.]
- The bride's clothes are given to her ('*edoth* ', 'it was given' - divine passive), whereas in self-reliance Babylon has acquired her adornment for herself (18:12).

The main point of the difference in clothing is what it represents, which is explicitly revealed to us in v.8b: the dress is made of *ta dikai mata t n hagi n* ('the righteous deeds of the saints'). There is much discussion as to how best to understand the genitive here - as subjective (deeds done by the saints) or objective (righteous acts performed for the saints by God - his vindication of them)?

Beale argues persuasively that we should understand the phrase in both of these senses.[32.] We note several of his points here:

- White robes elsewhere in Revelation are equated with both faithful works in this life and with the final reward that results from faithful living - the saints both possess pure garments during their earthly sojourn and they also receive white robes when they enter into heaven.[33.]
- The *dikaio* ('to justify') word group is used in Revelation both of God's just judgments, always with the nuance of vindication, and (e.g. 22:11) of acts of human righteousness.
- The most likely OT referent for the wedding clothes of the bride in Revelation 19 is Isaiah 61:10, where wedding garments of righteousness

are given by God to Israel to vindicate them before the world.

- This ambiguity in the genitive *t n hagi n* nicely parallels the apparent paradox in *h gun autou h toimasen heaut n* ('the bride has made herself ready') and *edoth aut i* ('it was given to her'; cf. 3:4-5). And yet there is no real contradiction since both are true. It is the same kind of synergism found in Philippians 2:12-13.[34]

As Beale notes, this dual sense of the pure linen suits the rhetorical purpose of Revelation,

> which includes exhortations to believers to stop soiling their garments (3:4-5) and not to be "found naked" (3:18; 16:15). This underscores the aspect of human accountability, which is highlighted by 19:7b: "his bride has *prepared* herself."[35] Yet, the readers can be encouraged to obey the exhortation by the knowledge that God has provided grace for them to clothe themselves now by the power of the Spirit… and also by recalling that they will receive "pure garments" from God at the end of their pilgrimage…[36]

Beale also suggests that Babylon has a role to play in the preparation of the bride, and in her being clothed with her garments of righteous deeds. 'Babylon's oppression and temptation was the fire ultimately used by God to refine the saints' faith to prepare them to enter the heavenly city.'[37] We have noted that fine linen comes from Babylon (18:12). Is this how the bride acquires the fine linen for her wedding garment from Babylon - not by buying it with the currency of Babylon (idolatry and adultery) but by *not* selling out to the corrupt world system?

19.9-10: Conclusion

The section comes to a conclusion in vv.9-10 with three further angelic statements each introduced by *kai legei moi* ('and he said to me').[38] The first is the fourth of the seven beatitudes in Revelation, which John is specifically commanded to write down, giving emphasis to the following beatitude. The command to write comes twelve times in the book. It is used of the whole message of the Apocalypse (1:11,19), of the seven oracles in chapters 2-3, and of individual messages in 14:13, 21.5, and here. There are striking parallels between these last three commands to write: 14:13 and 19:9 both contain beatitudes, while 19:9 and 21:5 both refer to the true (*al thinoi*) words of God.

The beatitude functions rhetorically not just as an encouragement to the faithful to persevere, but also as a warning to the readers to examine themselves and see if they qualify for the blessing described, and as a threat of the corresponding woe to those who do not.[39] It is a further example of how the visions of Revelation are constantly earthed in pastoral realities.

The change of metaphor from the church as bride to the church as guests invited to the wedding of the Lamb is paradoxical, but not unusual in Revelation. Mixed metaphors were common in the ancient world, especially in apocalyptic, adding richness to literary imagery (cf. 5:5-6, 7:17, 12:13,17). The explanation of the majority of commentators would seem to be best, *viz.* that the bride represents the church corporately, while the invited guests focus on individual Christians. The two metaphors relate also to the two aspects of human responsibility and divine sovereignty noted in the bride's self-preparation and reception of wedding garments.

The picture of a wedding feast is found only here in Revelation. It combines the eschatological banquet motif of the OT and early Judaism[40.] with the wedding supper of early Christianity - a picture of intimacy, happiness, peace, and consummation. It contrasts with the grisly 'supper' of 19:17 (the only other occurrence of the word in Revelation), which is the exact antithesis of the joyful wedding feast of the Lamb.

The beatitude is followed by a second solemn affirmation by the angel: *houtoi oi logoi al thinoi tou theou eisin* ('these are the true words of God'). There is much discussion as to which words 'these' are, and there is no obvious way to resolve the ambiguity. In keeping with the emphasis placed on the beatitude by the command to write it down, and in view of the need for the persecuted hearers to be reassured that they are in fact blessed by God regardless of appearances, it seems best to read it as a reference to the beatitude. What is clear, however, is the innertextual connection the phrase forges with 21:5 and particularly 22:6-10 where the same elements are present: a reference to the true words of God, a beatitude, a reference to prophecy, John falling down in worship of an angel who refuses his worship and commands him to worship God, not one who is a fellow-servant.[41.]

After all this John falls at the feet of the angel in an attempt to worship him, only to be sharply rebuked. This seems at first sight an odd way to conclude such a dramatic passage as 19:1-9, but in fact it is very fitting. One of the major themes of Revelation, as we have seen, is the contrast between the worship of the true God who alone is worthy of it and the misplaced worship of created things. Here is a graphic warning to John's hearers of how easy it is to fall into the trap of false worship, even for an apostle, and a clarion summons to all the readers of the Apocalypse to 'worship God!'. The scene is repeated again in 22:8-9, making clear that this is by no means a secondary issue but at the very heart of the rhetorical purpose of the book.[42.] The angel's immediate and emphatic refusal of John's worship eloquently argues for the high Christology of Revelation - only God and the Lamb are worthy to receive worship.[43.] His refusal is also in stark contrast to the beast's acceptance of human worship (13:4,8,12,15).

The angel explains why John must not give worship to him: the glorious and mighty angels John has seen in his visions are no more than fellow-servants alongside the saints. This has been clearly seen in heaven where even the highest orders of angels have given way to the glorified saints (e.g. 7:10-12, 14:3).

Conclusion

What then has this literary-theological reading of Revelation 19:1-10 yielded? We have seen the integral significance of this passage in the unfolding of Revelation's story, both literarily and theologically. The passage is a cross-roads in the narrative where many themes and motifs intersect. We have noted innertextual links to at least seventeen other parts of Revelation. In particular 19:1-10 is the third of three repeated scenes, connected by numerous sophisticated innertextual literary-theological links which anticipate the final triumph of God over evil: 7:9-17, 11:15-19, and 19:1-10.

There is an interesting progression in these three passages: 7:9-17 takes place *before* the seventh seal is opened; 11:15-19 occurs *on* the sounding of the seventh trumpet; and 19:1-10 happens *after* the seventh bowl has been poured out. In chapter 7 the victory is anticipated, in chapter 11 it begins to be realised, and in chapter 19 it has been realised.

The pattern of three recurring scenes suggests that the third in the series is the climax of these visions of the victory of God, which is supported by the heightened language observed throughout the passage in chapter 4. Why so? Because all that remains is the *experience* of what has been announced and initiated (still to be narrated in ch. 20-22). Thus we see heaven and earth beginning to merge in 19:5-8, in anticipation of the descent of the new Jerusalem in chapter 21. We cannot get any closer to the end without actually entering the eschaton.

This sense of approaching consummation is reflected too in the motif of worship. Revelation 19:1-10 records the last of the hymns of Revelation. We have seen how they are climactic in tone and volume, bringing to a crescendo the twin themes of judgment and reward as they culminate in the judgment of Babylon and the wedding of the Lamb. It is worship, aptly and typically, which accompanies both the judgment of the wicked and the imminent blessing of the righteous, for Revelation maintains throughout that it is worship in the final analysis which distinguishes the wicked from the righteous.

The focus and emphasis of 19:1-10 falls upon the second half of the passage - the fourth and final hallelujah, introduced with such weight (v.6) - celebrating the glorious wedding of the Lamb.

The announcement of the wedding of the Lamb may seem unexpected, not having been mentioned throughout the book, but it is a natural climax to the

biblical-theological theme of first Israel, and then the church, as the bride of God, given John's saturation in the thought-world of the OT, and also given the recurring theme in Revelation of harlotry. The world is portrayed as the great prostitute, committing adultery by her idolatry and failure to give worship, honour, and love to God. But the real and present danger for the church is that she will succumb to the seduction of the world and commit the same sins.

As we live in a world that increasingly resembles that of the first hearers of Revelation, may the Lord give to his people the grace and strength needed to stand firm against the seductive appeal of Babylon. Revelation 19:1-10 assures us that he does and will, so that the full number of the people of God will be presented to him as a spotless bride on the last day.

Notes

1. Bauckham, R.J. *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), p.22.
2. Resseguie, J.L. *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), p.23f, although he notes that this does not mean 'that the narrative critic is unaware of the social location, political environment, and other factors behind the text that influenced the [implied] reader.' Op.cit., p.39.
3. Giblin, C.H. 'Structural and Thematic Correlations in the Theology of Revelation 16-22,' *Biblica* 55 (1974): p.487-504.
4. Bauckham, R.J. *The Climax of Prophecy*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), p.133.
5. Johnson, D. *Discipleship on the Edge: An Expository Journey through the Book of Revelation*, (Vancouver, B.C.: Regent College Publishing, 2004), p.307.
6. Smalley, S.S. *The Revelation to John, A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*, (London: SPCK, 2005), p.191f.
7. Beale, G.K. *The Book of Revelation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), p.927.
8. Boring, M.E. *Revelation*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), p.193.
9. This is one of several important parallels between Rev. 5 and 19:1-10; cf. W.H. Shea, 'Revelation 5 and 19 as Literary Reciprocals,' *AUSS* 22.2 (1984), p.249-57.
10. Resseguie, J.L. *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), p.39.
11. Resseguie, Op.cit., p.234.
12. Prigent, P *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), p.524.
13. Thomas, R.L. *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1997), p.363.
14. Lupieri, E.F. *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006), p.307.
15. Cf. Bauckham *Climax,* p.30
16. Mounce, R.H. *The Book of Revelation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), p.340.
17. Prigent (2004), p.524).
18. Aune, D.E. *Revelation 17-22*, (Dallas, Texas: Word, 1998), p.1029.
19. Witherington, B. *Revelation.* New Cambridge Bible Commentary, (Cambridge and New York: CUP, 2003), p.232.
20. Cf. Beasley-Murray, G.R. *The Book of Revelation (New Century Bible)*, (London: Oliphants, 1974), p.274: '…a whole wealth of associations relating to salvation are brought together:

the prior love of God for man, revealed in deeds of grace which win the love of the bride; the depth of the fellowship between God and man, established in the love of God and the grace of Christ and mediated through the Holy Spirit (2 C. 13:13); the joy of that relationship, when the trials of the former days are forgotten in laughter and happiness around the table of the Lord in his kingdom.'

21. Thomas (1997), p.365, cf. Beckwith, I.T. *The Apocalypse of John*, (New York: Macmillan, 1919), p.726.
22. Boxall, I. *The Revelation of Saint John*, (London: Continuum, 2006), p.286f.
23. Isa. 49.18, 50.1, 54.6, 62.5; Jer. 3.20, 31.32; Ezk. 16.7-14; Hos. 2.14-23
24. Zimmermann, R. 'Nuptial Imagery in the Revelation of John,' *Biblica* 84 (2003): 153-83. p.164.
25. Isa. 25.6, 61.10b, 62.5; 1 En. 62.14; 3 En. 48.10; 2 Bar. 29.38; 2 Esd. 6.52.
26. It is found in subsequent literature in, e.g., 2 Clem. 14.2; Tertullian, *Contra Marc.* 5.18; Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 3.6; Methodius *Symp.* 7.7; Augustine *Serm.* 40.6.
27. Smalley (2005), p.482.
28. Resseguie (2009), p.235.
29. Cf. Batey *New Testament Nuptial Imagery,* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), p.67.
30. Prigent (2004), p.526.
31. Huber, L.R. *Like a Bride Adorned: Reading Metaphor in John's Apocalypse*, (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), p.157.
32. Beale (1999), p.941-2). He quotes N. Turner: 'There is much ambiguity [with regard to genitives] in NT interpretation. Often a gen. might equally well be subjective or objective: it is more important not to sacrifice fullness of interpretation to an over precise analysis of syntax. There is no reason why a gen. in the author's mind may not have been both subjective and objective.'
33. Cf. W.G. Campbell *L'Apocalypse de Jean: Une lecture thématique*, (Cléon d'Andran: Excelsis, 2007), p.194f.
34. *edoth* ('it was given') is used repeatedly (twenty times) in Revelation of God's sovereignty over the diverse events narrated in the book, thus complementing the meaning of *hetoimaz* discussed above.
35. For the subjective sense of the righteous deeds of the saints, see D. McIraith '"For the Fine Linen is the Righteous Deeds of the Saints": Works and Wife in Revelation 19.8,' *CBQ* 61 (1999), p.512-29, where the author argues that the righteous deeds referred to here are the *erga* ('works') sought by Christ - the 'first works' ensuring that one is in a living relationship with him - and in particular love, faith, endurance, and service (2:19).
36. Beale (1999) p.942.
37. Beale (1999) p.934.
38. The identity of the angel is disputed, but it is most likely the bowl angel of 17:1.
39. Cf. E.S. Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), p.102 and J. Sweet *Revelation*, (London: SCM Press, 1979), p.280.
40. Isa. 24.6-8, 25.6, 62.9; Ezk. 39.17. The idea was developed in inter-testamental literature, e.g., 1 En. 62.14 (the eschatological feast was especially associated with the Son of Man in Enochic literature); 2 Bar. 29.8, 2 Esd. (4 Ezra) 2.38, T. Isaac 6.22, 8.6; T. Jacob 7.21-8; 1 Qsa 2.11-21. In the NT, cf. Mt. 8.11, 26.29; Lk 13.29, 14.15.
41. Cf. Thomas (1997), p.373.
42. Cf. Campbell (2007), p.195f.
43. It is very unlikely, as the vast majority of commentators agree, that John is here combatting a pastoral problem of angel worship amongst the churches of Asia Minor. Cf. especially Prigent (2004), p.529-532.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF OUR FELLOWSHIP: 1 JOHN 1:1-7

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The Foundation of Our Fellowship – Part I
1 John 1:1-4

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:3)

The modern Ecumenical movement began in 1910 at the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland. The purpose of the Ecumenical movement was to create greater unity among Christians from a variety of different denominations. Unfortunately, the movement attempted to achieve this unity at the expense of sound doctrine and it ultimately produced a lowest common denominator form of Christianity.

Christians have often made the mistake of discarding doctrine in an effort to achieve greater unity in the church. We've all heard the mantra, "doctrine divides." The apostle John, however, offers a very different path to unity. John's mantra is "doctrine unites." As he begins his first epistle, John tells his readers that sound doctrine is part of the foundation of our fellowship with other believers and with God.

The Eternal Word

John commences his epistle in an unusual manner. In contrast to most of the other New Testament epistles, the opening of John's epistle lacks the usual apostolic identification and greeting. John does not identify himself and he does not identify his audience. He dispenses with all customary conventions and enters right into the heart of his message.

The first topic John addresses is the eternal self-existence of Jesus Christ: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched - this we proclaim concerning the Word of life" (1 John 1:1). John opens his first epistle much like he opens his Gospel; he speaks of Jesus as the eternal Word

("Word of life"[1]) and he takes us back to the beginning: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). By using the phrase "in the beginning," John not only takes us back to the beginning of his Gospel, but he also takes us back to the very beginning of everything by echoing the very first verse of the Bible, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). John opens his epistle by reminding his readers that Jesus had no beginning; he reminds them that Jesus is the eternal Word of God.[2]

John emphasizes the eternality of Jesus again in verse 2, "The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us." Here John states that Jesus, prior to his incarnation, was "with the Father." This phrase, "with the Father," also echoes the prologue of John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the *Word was with God*, and the Word was God. He *was with God* in the beginning" (John 1:1-2, emphasis mine). John reminds his readers that, before appearing as a man in his incarnation, Jesus had been with his Father from the very beginning. Jesus is the eternal Word.

Why did John begin his epistle by focusing on the eternality of Jesus Christ? He began with this emphasis for two reasons. First, John wrote this epistle to combat false doctrines regarding the person of Jesus Christ. Not long after the resurrection of Jesus, heresies began to emerge which denied either Christ's divinity or his humanity. One of the ways these false teachers attacked the divinity of Christ was by suggesting that Jesus was a created being who had a beginning. Therefore, John begins his epistle by confronting this false teaching. He made it clear to his readers that Jesus had no beginning. F.F. Bruce notes that John informed his readers that, "The world had a beginning, but the Word had none."[3]

The second reason why John began his epistle with an emphasis on the eternality of Jesus is because he wanted his readers to embrace Jesus Christ as the sole source of eternal life. John tells his readers that Jesus is able to grant eternal life because he is "eternal life" (1 John 1:2). That Jesus is the source of eternal life is one of the major themes of 1 John (see 1:2, 2:25, 3:15, 5:11, 13, and 20). John not only begins his epistle with this emphasis, but he concludes his epistle with it as well. In the second to last verse of the epistle John once again weaves together the themes of eternality, divinity and eternal life: "We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true - even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God *and eternal life*" (1 John 5:20, emphasis mine). John reminds his readers that only the eternal Word is capable of granting eternal life.

John's defence of the eternality and divinity of Jesus Christ is much

needed in our day. Many people today will acknowledge that Jesus was a wise sage and a great moral teacher while simultaneously denying that he is the divine and eternal Son of God. Even many biblical scholars have adopted this type of thinking by exchanging the divine "Jesus of faith" revealed in the Gospels for their own divinely neutered version of the "Jesus of history." The scholars who have engaged in the so-called "Quest for the Historical Jesus" have concluded that while Jesus may have been a prophet, charismatic holy man, oriental guru or even a feminist, he certainly was not the divine and eternal Son of God. Denying the divinity of Christ is not just an ancient heresy, it is a perennial heresy. John reminds us that to deny the divinity of Jesus is to deny the Christian faith. As C.S. Lewis so aptly noted in his book *Mere Christianity*, Jesus' own teaching about himself will not allow us to acknowledge him as anything less than divine:

> A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg - or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.[4.]

John begins his epistle by proclaiming that Jesus Christ is the eternal Word of God. He tells his readers that true fellowship with God, and with other believers, is dependent on the acceptance of this truth.

The Incarnate Word

After affirming the divinity of Jesus in the opening words of his epistle, John immediately turns to his main interest - affirming the humanity of Jesus. In the first verse of his epistle, John declares that the divine and eternal Word of God has also been "heard," "seen," and "touched." It's impossible to miss John's point here. His point is that the eternal and invisible Word became the incarnate and visible Word. Once again John echoes the teaching present in the prologue of his Gospel: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). John declares that Jesus is the incarnate Word of God

John approaches the topic of the incarnation of Jesus in an apologetic manner. He cites evidence to support his claim. John substantiates his case for the incarnation of Jesus by demonstrating that Jesus' human nature was verified by three of the five senses - Jesus was heard, seen and touched. It's the last of these three senses, touch, which is most persuasive and probative in John's mind. As John Stott notes, "To have *heard* was not enough; people 'heard' God's voice in the Old Testament. To have *seen* was more compelling. But to

have *touched* was conclusive proof of material reality."[5] The Greek word John chose to use for "touch" (*epselaphesan*) serves to further emphasize the reality of the incarnation. *Epselaphesan* implies a lengthy grope, like that of a man feeling his way through a dark room. Jesus employs a form of this same verb to prove to his disciples the reality of his own bodily resurrection: "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! *Touch* me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have" (Luke 24:39, emphasis mine). John testifies to his readers that he has personally heard, seen and touched the human flesh of Jesus. John declares that he is an eyewitness of the truth of the incarnation.

Why is John so adamant about this point? Why does he make such an extensive case for the incarnation? As previously mentioned, John is writing this epistle to correct false doctrine about the person of Jesus Christ. Based on the emphases of his epistle and based on other historical evidence,[6] it is clear that the main doctrinal error John was confronting was the denial that Jesus possessed a true physical body. It is likely this heresy emerged from a Greek philosophy known as "Gnosticism" which maintained, among other things, that the material world is inherently evil.[7] Obviously, anyone adhering to the tenets of Gnosticism would find it impossible to accept that a divine being could participate in this material world by becoming incarnate. This is why the Gnostics contended that Jesus was not truly human, but only appeared in the form of humanity. According to the Gnostics, Jesus only seemed to be human. John, of course, unequivocally refutes this teaching with the power of his own apostolic eyewitness testimony. John was a credible witness. He had walked with Jesus for three years. He had rested his head on Jesus' chest. He had personally heard, seen and touched Jesus. John knew that Jesus had a true human body and John tells his readers that in order to fellowship with God, and with other believers, they too must know and accept this truth.

Like the heresy of denying Christ's divinity, the heresy of denying his humanity also remains a pressing issue for the contemporary church. John's words of refutation against the Gnostics remains relevant because there has been a resurgence of Gnosticism in our day. Neo-Gnosticism has gained a foothold both on a scholarly level and on a broader cultural level.

On the scholarly level, there has been a tremendous amount of academic interest in the so-called "Gnostic Gospels" which claim to provide details of Jesus' childhood and even his romantic interests. One of these Gnostic Gospels, the *Gospel of Judas*, even contends that Judas was a hero rather than a traitor! In addition to these bizarre teachings, some of the Gnostic Gospels, such as the *Gospel of Philip*, also openly repudiate the humanity of Jesus. Because of this renewed academic interest in the Gnostic Gospels, evangelical scholars have found it necessary once again to demonstrate the spurious nature of these writings and their teachings.[8]

On a broader cultural level, Gnosticism has experienced a revival through the avenue of the New Age movement and through popular books and movies such as Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. This popular manifestation of Neo-Gnosticism views the divine as a disembodied impersonal life force. Like the ancient Gnostics confronted by John, modern Neo-Gnostics are once again advocating a concept of the divine as a dehumanized spiritual force.

Reaffirming the truth of the incarnation of Jesus Christ has been a necessity for every generation of believers. The early church was required to defend this doctrine. Many of the early ecumenical creeds of the church, such as The Nicene Creed (325 A.D.) and The Creed of Chalcedon (451 A.D), affirm the humanity of Jesus Christ. The church at the time of the Reformation also affirmed the incarnation in its confessions. For example, consider the wording of the answer to *Westminster Shorter Catechism* Question 22, "How did Christ, being the Son of God, become man?

> Christ, the Son of God, became man, *by taking to himself a true body*, and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin (emphasis mine).

The Westminster Divines were careful to affirm that Jesus did not merely appear as a man, but instead possessed a "true body." The church in every age has found it necessary to rearticulate and defend the truth of the incarnation.

The reason why the church must vigorously defend the truth of the incarnation is because it is central to the biblical doctrine of salvation. Michael Horton, referencing the thoughts of the great medieval theologian, Anselm, summarizes the importance of the incarnation:

> As Anselm argued in the eleventh century, the Savior had to be God in order to achieve our salvation by paying an infinite price and rising again, but he had to be human in order to be a true legal representative of Adam and his chosen seed. Only God *could* save, but only a man *should* save. It was, after all, humanity that owed the debt.[9]

Without the incarnation we have no salvation. Jesus had to become like us in order for us to become like him. Given the importance of the doctrine of the incarnation, we must be ever faithful in repeating the apostolic testimony of John that the Eternal Son of God became man and was heard, seen and touched. We must proclaim that Jesus is the incarnate Word.

The Proclaimed Word

In his commentary on the Epistles of John, I. Howard Marshall describes the opening of John's first epistle as both "lofty" and "difficult."[10] Marshall

suggests that John's first epistle is lofty because, as we have seen, John immediately launches into a deep discussion of the two natures of Jesus Christ. John's first epistle is difficult, according to Marshall, because the first three and one half verses of our English translation are actually one long sentence in the original Greek. Adding to the difficulty of this opening sentence is the fact that its main verb, "we proclaim" (*apangellomen*), does not appear until the very end.[11] Although the verb, "we proclaim," appears at the end of his opening sentence, it is foremost in John's mind. John's main concern is not simply that his readers believe in *a* Christ, but rather he is concerned that his readers believe in *the* true Christ, the Christ proclaimed by John and the other apostles. John is calling his readers to embrace the apostolically proclaimed Word.

John stresses the absolute necessity of embracing the apostolic proclamation of Jesus by making it part of the foundation for fellowship with the apostolic church: "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, *so that you also may have fellowship with us*" (1 John 1:3, emphasis mine). In this verse, John once again sets forth a connection between doctrine and fellowship.

John sets forth this connection between doctrine and fellowship through a logical chain of reasoning which is linked by his careful use of personal pronouns. Therefore, in order to track John's argument we must pay careful attention to the pronouns. First, we must grasp that John uses the first person plural pronouns "we" and "us" to refer to the apostles. Second, we must understand that John uses the second person plural pronoun "you" to refer to the readers of the epistle.

John begins his logical argument by noting that only the apostles ("we") actually saw and heard Jesus, "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard" (1 John 1:3a). The false teachers John was opposing could not make this claim. Therefore, the apostles are uniquely qualified to proclaim the true Christ. John then notes that it is only by embracing this apostolic proclamation that the readers ("you") can attain true fellowship with the apostolic church ("us"). F.F. Bruce summarizes the substance of John's argument as follows: "*we* had this experience, *you* did not have it, but *we* are sharing it with *you* in order that *you* may share it with *us*."[12] John contends that fellowship with the church is contingent upon acceptance of the apostolic proclamation of Jesus Christ. However, this is not the end of John's argument. There's one more link in the chain of his reasoning.

John concludes his argument in 1 John 1:3 by declaring that embracing the apostolic proclamation not only leads to fellowship with the apostolic church, but also, by implication, with God himself: "And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3c). John has already told his readers that they can experience fellowship with the apostles by embracing the apostolic proclamation regarding Jesus Christ, but now he adds the statement that the apostles (the "our" in 1 John 1:3c) have fellowship with the "Father and

with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3c). The implication of John's argument is clear: when one is in fellowship with the apostles he is also in fellowship with God. Of course, the opposite is also true. As F.F. Bruce noted, "Those who abandoned the apostolic teaching and fellowship severed themselves from fellowship with the Father and the Son."[13] John contends that fellowship with God is contingent upon acceptance of the apostolic proclamation of Jesus Christ.

John tells us that part of what unites Christians to each other, to the church and to God is what we believe about Jesus Christ. He reminds us that embracing true doctrine is a prerequisite for true Christian fellowship. The Greek word for "fellowship" (*koinonia*) means to have something in common. One of things we must have in common in order to experience true Christian fellowship is an orthodox confession about the person of Jesus Christ. John tells us that fellowship and doctrine are interrelated concepts.

In the evangelical church today, the term "fellowship" has become a hackneyed catch phrase. According to modern evangelicalism, almost everything a Christian does in the church is deemed as "fellowship." Churches have fellowship meals, fellowship groups and even fellowship committees. While none of these ideas are improper, they do tend to water down the true meaning of the biblical concept of fellowship. John reminds us that true Christian fellowship is built on the foundation of shared beliefs regarding Jesus Christ. John Stott provides this helpful reminder to the modern church: "We cannot be content with…a church life whose principle of cohesion is a superficial social camaraderie instead of a spiritual fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."[14] True fellowship requires that we embrace the apostolic proclamation regarding Jesus Christ. True fellowship is only possible when we embrace the apostolically proclaimed Word.

Complete Joy

John concludes the opening section of his epistle by revealing one of his purposes in writing his letter, "We write this to make our joy complete" (1 John 1:4). There is a textual variant in this verse. Some manuscripts read "*your* joy" rather than "*our* joy." While there are advocates on both sides of this issue, most scholars believe that John is referring here primarily to his own apostolic and pastoral joy.[15] In other words, what John is saying here is that he will be filled with great joy if his readers reject the false teachers and instead embrace the truth of his apostolic proclamation of Jesus Christ. D. Edmond Hiebert describes the joy which John refers to as, "the joy of the Christian teachers whose hearts rejoice when they observe the message is effective in the lives of their hearers."[16] John is pastorally concerned regarding the welfare of his flock. He is burdened for them. He desires them to embrace the truth of his teaching and he will only experience complete joy when they do.

While John is clearly passionate about his readers embracing true doctrine about Jesus Christ, it is important to point out that his ultimate desire is for his readers to have fellowship with the *person* of Jesus Christ. The Word of life that John is proclaiming to his readers is more than a collection of propositions. John is ultimately proclaiming a person to his readers. It's important for the modern church to be reminded of this reality because there is a temptation for Christians, particularly those in Reformed and conservative evangelical circles, to place their faith in their well articulated doctrines and carefully formulated confessions. John reminds us that eternal life is not ultimately found in a system of doctrine, but rather in a person who is the "Word of life." Systems don't save, only Jesus saves. James Montgomery Boice issued this helpful reminder to the church:

> But a system is not life, nor does it transform a life. A system in and of itself is nothing. What Christianity has and the others do not have is life, in fact, the life of Jesus Himself, the One who is the creator and sustainer of all life and who as the life is also the light of men (John 1:4). It is Christ, then, who is proclaimed in Christianity.[17]

John proclaimed to his readers more than mere propositions. He proclaimed Christ to them. Therefore, John's pastoral joy could only be made complete when his readers experienced what he had already experienced - true fellowship with the "Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). John wants his modern readers to share in this experience as well. Our joy is complete when we embrace the person of Jesus Christ and experience true fellowship with the triune God.

In the opening verses of his first epistle, John reminds us that true spiritual fellowship is grounded in what we believe regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ. He reminds us that doctrine does matter. He tells his readers that those who do not embrace the apostolic teaching regarding Jesus Christ cannot experience true fellowship with God. True church unity can never be achieved at the expense of orthodox doctrine. The purpose of sound doctrine is not to divide, but rather to serve as part of the basis for true union. John reminds us that doctrine is part of the foundation of our fellowship, both with one another and with the triune God.

The Foundation of Our Fellowship – Part II
1 John 1:5-7

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John 5:7)

Most Christians are familiar with the term "orthodoxy." The word

"orthodoxy" is formed by joining together two Greek words: *ortho* (meaning "right" or "correct") and *doxa* (meaning "thought" or "teaching"). An "orthodox" Christian is one who adheres to correct teaching about God and his Word. We saw how important orthodoxy is to true fellowship with God in the first four verses of John's epistle. In this next section of his epistle, however, John reminds us that orthodoxy alone is insufficient to experience true fellowship with God. In 1 John 1:5-7, John reminds us that in order to experience true fellowship with God we must embrace "orthopraxy" as well as orthodoxy.

Like orthodoxy, orthopraxy is made up of two Greek words: *ortho* (meaning "right" or "correct") and *praxis* (meaning "practice" or "doing"). Therefore, orthopraxy means right practice. While orthodoxy addresses how we are to *think* as Christians, orthopraxy addresses how we are to *live* as Christians. In other words, Christians must not only talk the talk, but they must also walk the walk. This is why John tells his readers in 1 John 1:5-7 that true fellowship with God can only be realized by walking in the light.

God is Light

John begins his exploration of the demand for orthopraxy by immediately focusing his readers' attention on the nature and character of God: "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). In this text we encounter one of the three "God is" statements recorded in John's writings. The first one of these sayings was spoken by Jesus himself during his encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well: "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). The second one appears here in our text: "God is light." The third one occurs in 1 John 4:8: "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." God is spirit, God is light, and God is love. It is important to point out that each of these "God is" statements occur without the definite article ("the") proceeding these attributes. James Montgomery Boice commented on the theological significance of this grammatical construction:

> We are told, then, not that God is the Spirit, the light, and the love or even, in all probability, a spirit, a light and a love, but rather spirit, light, and love themselves. In this we have the broadest and most comprehensive definition of God that can probably be devised in human language.[18]

As you can see, each of these statements, while short in length, reveals deep and profound things about the glorious character of God. So what exactly does John want his readers to understand about the character of God by this particular "God is" statement? What does John mean by the phrase "God is light?"

Anyone familiar with the writings of John will quickly recognize that light is one of his favorite metaphors. John uses the word "light" a total of 37 times in his writings and he employs it six times in this first epistle.[19] While John uses the metaphor of light in a variety of ways in his writings, he most frequently uses it as a metaphor for purity or holiness. For John, light represents the good, the pure and the holy, while its opposite, darkness, represents immorality, evilness and wickedness. John employs the metaphors of light and darkness for ethical purposes. Therefore, when John declares that "God is light" he is declaring that God is holy. For example, F.F. Bruce notes that when John writes "God is light" he is declaring that, "God…is the source and essence of holiness and righteousness, goodness and truth; in Him there is nothing that is unholy or unrighteous, evil or false."[20]

John makes his declaration of God's holiness even more emphatic by reinforcing it by means of antithetical parallelism[21] at the end of verse 5 where he states that in God, "there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). John employs a forceful absolute in the original Greek here to further emphasize his point. For example, Kenneth Wuest translates the end of verse 5 as, "and darkness in Him does not exist, not even one particle."[22] John not only absolutely affirms that God is light, but he also absolutely affirms that God is not darkness.

In 1 John 1:5, John sets forth an absolute antithesis between light and darkness. John informs his readers that there is no way to mix darkness and light when it comes to the character of God. D. Edmond Hiebert notes that John understands light and darkness as "two separate and distinct spheres of existence" which "represent two antithetical realms that cannot be mixed."[23] By setting forth this antithesis John is once again confronting the false teaching of the Gnostics.

The Gnostics were continually seeking enlightenment. They were looking for "light." In fact, Gnosticism has been described by some as a "religion of light."[24] However, the Gnostics did not embrace a strict antithesis between light and darkness. Instead, the Gnostics allowed for a mixture of light and darkness in their concept of the divine. The Gnostics believed that divine beings could possess flawed human characteristics. According to the Gnostics, the divine was both light and darkness. John excludes such thinking by declaring that "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).

John, however, is not only refuting false doctrine here, he is also revealing a vital truth about the pathway to holiness. In the verses which follow verse 5, John calls his readers to personal holiness by demanding that they walk in the light. However, it is vitally important to recognize that before issuing this calling John first draws his readers' attention to God's holiness. Before calling his readers to the walk in the light, John reveals to them the only true source of light. God serves as the starting point of John's discussion of holiness.

God must be the starting point of all theological inquiries. When we fail to start with God our theological conclusions often go askew. Martyn Lloyd-Jones once noted that "half our troubles arise in the Christian life because we do not start at this point."[25] While starting with God is important in any theological matter, it is of particular importance when dealing with the matter of personal holiness. Too often Christians begin their pursuit of holiness by using themselves as a starting point. This is extremely dangerous because there is no inherent holiness in us. When we pursue holiness in our own strength we often end up floundering in utter despair or locked in the chains of legalism. By making God the starting point of his discussion of holiness, John reminds us that God is not only the source for the imperative regarding personal holiness, but he is also the source of the fulfillment of the imperative. The indicative of God's holiness, that God *is* light, is what makes it possible for us to fulfill the imperative to walk in the light. In 1 John 1:5, John reminds us that we won't find the source of holiness in ourselves, but rather it can only be found through union and fellowship with God who is, by definition, the source of pure and holy light.

Walking in the Darkness

Having established that darkness is utterly incompatible with the character and nature of God, John proceeds to apply this truth to the practical life of the believer: "If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth" (1 John 1:6). In this verse, John sets forth a standard for experiencing fellowship with God. He states that God will not maintain fellowship with those who are walking in darkness.

John, of course, is using darkness in an ethical sense in this verse. Darkness is a metaphor for sin. At first glance, this verse seems to exclude everyone from experiencing fellowship with God, after all even Christians continue to sin. However, by using the verb "walk" in this verse John demonstrates that he is excluding from fellowship with God those who have a persistent lifestyle of sin, not those who fall into occasional sin.

The verb "walk" in verse 6 is a translation of the Greek word *peripateo. Peripateo* can simply refer to the physical act of walking, but it can also refer to a person's behavior, conduct and lifestyle. John is using *peripateo* in this latter ethical sense. The use of the word "walk" as metaphor for a pattern of living has deep roots in the Old Testament. For example, the Hebrew word for walk, *halak*, was so frequently used as a metaphor for holy living that it became used in the name of part of the rabbinical oral tradition (the "*halakhah*") which attempted to apply God's Word to everyday life. Therefore, when John speaks of walking in the darkness he is describing an immoral way of life which is wholly at odds with God's Word.

It is very likely that John is once again contradicting the claims of the false teachers. The Gnostics' negative view of matter not only led them to deny the incarnation of Jesus Christ, but it also led them to embrace a form of lawlessness. The Gnostics' low view of the flesh led them to falsely conclude that there was no connection between the deeds of the flesh and their spiritual well-being. John Stott describes their thinking: "They thought of the body as a mere envelope covering the human spirit, which, they further maintained, was inviolable; it could not be contaminated by the deeds of the body."[26] Given this type of thinking, it is not surprising that these false teachers embraced an immoral lifestyle. The false teachers were walking in darkness. Gary Burge notes that John's opponents "were not just in darkness, they were living lives of darkness…They were persistent, dogged, and tenacious in the habits they had chosen."[27]

The false teachers believed that a person could walk in the darkness and still have fellowship with the light. John denounces such teaching as a blatant and destructive lie. John teaches that it is impossible to walk in the darkness and still remain in fellowship with God. According to John, there is a great gulf fixed between darkness and light, a gulf which cannot be bridged. Here John echoes the teaching of his fellow apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:14: "…what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?"

The false teaching which John was combating in this verse continues to plague the church today. Many Christians believe that there is little or no connection between their behaviour and their enjoyment of spiritual fellowship with God. For example, some Christians have gone so far as to openly declare that God's moral law is no longer binding on the life of believers. Most of the time, however, the disconnect between morality and spirituality occurs on a much more subtle level. Christians often deceive themselves into believing that they can walk with one foot in the world and one foot in the church, and this divided loyalty will have no impact on their fellowship with God. John reminds us that nothing could be further from the truth. It's important for us to grasp that John's warning in verse 6 applies to us as well: "If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth" (1 John 1:6). Walking in darkness is antithetical to experiencing fellowship with God.

Walking in the Light

At the beginning of verse 7 John reiterates the teaching of verse 6, but this time he states the principle in positive terms: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another." John once again employs the Greek word *peripateo* ("walk") here revealing that fellowship with God is

experienced by those who pattern their lives after God's own character. When we walk in the light, that is when we embody a lifestyle which is in concert with God's law and character, we find ourselves in the environment in which God dwells. I. Howard Marshall describes the dynamic of this verse as follows: "To live in the light is to come into the sphere where God himself is to be found, or rather to live in the same way as God himself."[28] If we walk in the light we have fellowship with God because God dwells in the light. As John puts it, God "is in the light."

While the primary benefit of walking in the light is fellowship with God, John goes on to note two additional benefits of walking in the light. First, he tells us that those who walk in the light not only have fellowship with God, but they also have fellowship with one another: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another." By walking in the light believers not only experience communion with God, but they also experience communion with one another.[29] John sees these two forms of communion as intimately interrelated. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* also connects these two forms of communion:

> All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by his Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.[30.]

It is our fellowship and union with Christ which makes possible our fellowship and union with one another.

It's important to notice that John views fellowship with other believers not only as one of the benefits of walking in the light, but also as one of the proofs that a person is walking in the light. According to John, fellowship with other believers is tangible evidence that one is in fellowship with God. While modern evangelicalism has often placed great emphasis on having a "personal" relationship with Jesus Christ, it has sometimes been less insistent about calling people to have personal relationships with other believers, particularly by becoming committed members of a local congregation. John warns us that we can't have a healthy relationship with God if we do not have a relationship with his church. D. Edmond Hiebert summarizes the implicit warning of John in this text: "He who consistently has trouble maintaining fellowship with others walking in the light should examine his own claim of fellowship with God."[31.]

John reveals the second additional benefit of walking in the light at the very end of verse 7 where he notes that when we walk in the light we receive the "blood of Jesus" which "purifies us from all sin." This is a marvelous truth. John tells his readers that those who walk in the light experience the ongoing

blessing of the forgiveness of sins. This benefit of walking in the light makes it abundantly clear that John does not conceive of walking in the light as achieving a state of sinless perfection. According to John's logic here, those who walk in the light will nonetheless continue to sin and will be in continual need of the purifying blood of Jesus.[32] In fact, the reality is that those who walk in the light will find an ever greater need for purification from sins because the closer they are to the light of God's holiness the more aware they will become of the extent of their own sinfulness. Thankfully, those who walk in the light are granted access to the inexhaustible purifying power of the blood of Jesus Christ!

The good news of verse 7 becomes even better news when we note the presence of the universal word "all." John states that the blood of Jesus "purifies us from *all* sin." The word "all" reminds us that the forgiveness found in the blood of Christ is able to purify us from every type of sin imaginable. The forgiveness we experience in Christ is not only continually available, but it is comprehensive as well. Through the blood of Jesus we are made completely clean from all our sins. The blood of Jesus fulfills the promise of God spoken through the prophet Isaiah, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool" (Isaiah 1:18). When Jesus cleanses our sins they are completely cleansed. As D. Edmond Hiebert put it, "No sin, however heinous, is beyond the cleansing power of Christ's blood."[33] The purifying power of Christ's blood knows no limit and has no bounds.

According to John, walking in the light results in three glorious blessings: it brings us into fellowship with God, it brings us into fellowship with other believers and, finally, it allows us to be continually and comprehensively purified from all our sins. What blessed rewards are found in walking where God dwells!

The Intersection of Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy

In this section of his epistle John reminds us that right doctrine is insufficient to establish fellowship with God. John tells us that right doctrine must be accompanied by right living. Orthodoxy must always intersect with orthopraxy. John informs us that if we desire fellowship with God we must walk in the sphere of light where he dwells. Because God is light, we must also be light. John's argument in this text is similar to that of Peter in 1 Peter 15-16: "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'" John's teaching here also resonates with the teaching of Jesus who declared that because he is the "light of the world" (John 8:12) we too must be the light of the world:

> You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16).

By calling us to walk in the light John is calling us to be like the one whose name we bear. If we claim to be children of God, then we must live like children of God.

There's a story regarding Alexander the Great which effectively illustrates John's point. There was a man in the army of Alexander the Great who was also named Alexander. This soldier was accused of conducting himself in a cowardly manner and was brought before Alexander the Great for questioning. Alexander the Great asked the man what his name was and the soldier sheepishly replied "Alexander." Alexander the Great retorted, "I can't hear you." The soldier again stated his name, but this time a bit louder. Alexander the Great asked the soldier to repeat his name a third time and the soldier answered in a loud voice "Alexander." Alexander the Great then rebuked the soldier with these words: "Either change your name or change your conduct." John is telling us that if we are walking in darkness and claiming to be a Christian we only have two options: we must either change our name or change our conduct.

Notes

1. Some commentators have contended that the phrase "Word of life" is not a reference to Jesus Christ, but rather to the message proclaimed about him. This understanding seems unlikely given the context. John tells us that the "Word of life" was not only "heard," but also seen and touched (1 John 1:1-2). For a helpful discussion on this issue see John R.W. Stott, *The Letters of John: TNTC* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), p.62 and 72-75.
2. Some commentators argue that what John is referring to by the phrase "in the beginning" is not the pre-existence of Christ, but rather to the beginning of his earthly ministry. However, even many of the advocates of this position acknowledge that John may also be making a connection here to the eternality of Christ by this phrase.
3. F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), p.35.
4. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1952), p.55-56.
5. John R.W. Stott, *The Letters of John: TNTC* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), p.65.
6. We know from the writings of the church fathers, such as Ireneaus and Eusebius, that a false teacher named Cerinthus was circulating Christological heresies in Ephesus (the destination of 1 John) during the period in which John wrote his epistles.
7. There is a debate among scholars regarding the exact nature of the heresy John was confronting in this epistle. Some, like F.F. Bruce, refer to it as the ancient heresy of Docetism [see F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), p.16-18], while others, such as John Stott, contend that it was simply a form of proto-Gnosticism [see John R.W. Stott, *The Letters of John: TNTC* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), p.48-55]. Both of these heresies, Docetism and Gnosticism, shared the view that the material world was evil and thus would have opposed the doctrine of the incarnation.

8. Some examples of this effort to refute the teachings of the Gnostic Gospels include Darrell L. Bock's, *The Missing Gospels*, (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2006) and Craig A. Evans', *Fabricating Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006).
9. Michael Horton, *We Believe* (Nashville, TN: Word, 1998), p.78.
10. I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John: NICNT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), p.99.
11. The NIV, like other English translations, has inserted the verb "we proclaim" into the first verse, even though it doesn't appear there in the original, in order to assist modern readers in comprehending John's emphasis on teaching and proclamation.
12. Bruce, *The Epistles of John*, p.38.
13. Bruce, *The Epistles of John*, p.39.
14. Stott, *The Letters of John*, p.69.
15. See Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 105, footnote 19. It is important to note that this variant is not very significant because, based on the context of the verse, either translation ultimately leads to a collective understanding of the joy experienced. The joy spoken of here is ultimately experienced by John, the apostles and his readers. For example, F.F. Bruce notes that this variant is not "very important" because the "our" is "the inclusive 'our' (meaning 'our joy and yours together'), not the exclusive ('our joy not yours.')." Bruce, *The Epistles of John*, p.40. Similarly, John Stott writes of this verse, "The fellowship and joy are both to be a common possession between the apostle and his readers." John R.W. Stott, *The Letters of John*, p.71.
16. D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistles of John* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1991), p.50. John speaks of this type of joy in his third epistle where he writes, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (3 John 1:4).
17. James Montgomery Boice, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), p.26.
18. James Montgomery Boice, *The Epistles of John*, p.35.
19. 1 John 1:5, 7 (twice); 2:8, 9, 10.
20. Bruce, *The Epistles of John*, p.41.
21. Antithetical parallelism occurs when a thought is repeated by means of antonyms (i.e. light/dark, heavy/light, etc.). This contrasts with synonymous parallelism in which the same thought is repeated by means of synonyms.
22. Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), p.565.
23. Hiebert, *The Epistles of John*, p.58.
24. Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John: Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 51, David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, ed., (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), p.19.
25. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Fellowship with God: Studies in 1 John*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), p.100.
26. Stott, *The Letters of John,* p.79.
27. Gary E. Burge, *Letters of John: NIVAC* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), p.68.
28. Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, p.111.
29. It is possible that John is once again confronting the false teaching of the Gnostics who likely taught that fellowship with the divine was unrelated to fellowship with God's people.
30. *Westminster Confession of Faith* 26:1.
31. Hiebert, *The Epistles of John*, p.62.
32. John emphasizes the ongoing nature of this need for forgiveness by using a present tense form of the verb "to purify" (*katharizei*).
33. Hiebert, *The Epistles of John*, p.63.

HEZEKIAH'S TUNNEL

C. J. Williams

The tunnel

Having decimated Samaria in 722 BC, the Assyrian Empire reached its zenith of power in the late 8th century. King Hezekiah of Judah (715-687/686 BC) began to brace his tiny nation for the inevitable Assyrian invasion, taking steps to defend Jerusalem against the impending attack. Jerusalem's greatest vulnerability was her water supply, the Gihon Spring, which was located outside the city walls. If an invading army gained control of this spring it could easily cut off the water supply and overwhelm the city. Recognizing this strategic disadvantage, Hezekiah took steps to keep fresh water from the invading army while defending Jerusalem's water supply. The biblical record describes this ambitious project:

> When Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come and that he intended to make war on Jerusalem, he consulted with his officials and military staff about blocking off the water from the springs outside the city, and they helped him. A large force of men assembled, and they blocked all the springs and the stream that flowed through the land. "Why should the kings of Assyria come and find plenty of water?" they said.
> *2 Chronicles 32:2-4*

> It was Hezekiah who blocked the upper outlet of the Gihon spring and channelled the water down to the west side of the City of David. He succeeded in everything he undertook.
> *2 Chronicles 32:30*

> As for the other events of Hezekiah's reign, all his achievements and how he made the pool and the tunnel by which he brought water into the city, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah?
> *2 Kings 20:20*

The text indicates that Hezekiah brought the waters of the Gihon Spring into the west side of the city by means of a tunnel, which most agree would have been a monumental feat of engineering in his day. The tunnel remained legendary until almost 2,500 years later when it was discovered and documented by the American explorer Edward Robinson in 1838. Crawling along on his elbows through the narrowest parts, Robinson navigated the winding tunnel for nearly 1,800 feet and discovered that it was a conduit from the Gihon Spring to what he believed was the pool of Siloam mentioned in the Bible.[1] This was the first recorded exploration of the tunnel in modern times.

The tunnel was explored again in 1867 by Charles Warren, who recorded his adventures in humorous detail: "I was particularly embarrassed: one hand necessarily wet and dirty, the other holding a pencil, compass, and field book; the candle for the most part in my mouth."[2] It is amusing to reflect on the fact that after 2,500 years of scientific advancement the initial exploration of the tunnel took place with little more technology than its construction.

With only a candle in his mouth, it is little wonder that Warren missed the inscription on the southern end of the tunnel. It was not until 1880 that a young boy discovered it by accident while wading in the pool and exploring the tunnel on a hot June day. The boy reported his find to his teacher, a German architect named Conrad Schick, who in turn passed on news of the inscription to the academic community. The discovery of this inscription, which will be dealt with later in this article, revived scholarly interest in the tunnel and its history.

Perhaps the oddest chapter in the history of the tunnel came twenty-nine years later, when Captain Montague Parker and a team of English engineers explored the tunnel with the hope of finding the Ark of the Covenant. Parker was a retired officer of the British army and had no archaeological training or experience; it seems that he was motivated by the lure of adventure and pure curiosity. He was guided by a companion who thought that he had uncovered the location of the Ark by applying cryptography to the Book of Ezekiel. Needless to say, they never found the Ark. Their expedition came to an ignominious end when an angry mob of Muslim pilgrims chased them back to their yacht in the port of Joppa.[3]

Although bizarre in its conception and conclusion, Parker's expedition yielded valuable information about the tunnel and its construction. The tunnel was found to be 1,749 feet long, having an average height of 5 feet 11 inches, and a slope of 7 feet 2 inches for the length of the tunnel.[4] It was determined that the tunnel was constructed by two groups of workmen digging toward each other from opposite ends, just as the Siloam inscription suggests, although it remained a mystery why they dug in such a meandering course.

Since then, a century of research has brought to light many details about the construction of the tunnel. For instance, it was always wondered how the workers were able to maintain such a slight and precise angle in the tunnel. Avraham Faust has offered the convincing theory that the workers on the higher end, tunneling from the Gihon Spring, could gauge the tunnel's angle by measuring the depth of the water flowing into the tunnel, which enabled them to maintain a constant, even slope.[5] In this theory, most of the tunneling would have been done from the higher end. This hypothesis is supported by the location of the Siloam inscription, which is thought to be the point where the two mining crews met. The inscription is much closer to the entrance of the low end of the tunnel, near the pool of Siloam, indicating that most of the work had been done from the high end.

The winding course of the tunnel, as well as the miners' ability to meet underground, have been the subjects of much speculation and research. A geological study by Dan Gill in 1991 suggested that the miners followed an existing karstic crevice[6.] and simply enlarged it, which would account for the winding course of the tunnel.[7.] Gill summarized his theory thus:

> My principal postulate is that a natural karstic conduit, with a winding course, originally ran under the spur of the city of David, from its southern end in the Tyropoeon Valley to the southern end of the lower tunnel of the Warren's Shaft Installation…This scenario explains all the apparent design anomalies and the other outstanding questions of construction, namely, the winding course, the extra length, the irregular height and texture of the ceiling, the accuracy of the leveling, the fact that two teams could work towards each other from opposite ends without going astray to meet in the middle, and the availability of a constant supply of fresh air for the underground operations.[8.]

Other scholars were quick to retort, pointing out the unlikely presence of such a long, continuous crevice in a spot so favorable to the tunnel's purpose. An article by Ronny Reich and Eli Shukron offered the following criticism of Gill's theory and a different hypothesis concerning the course of the tunnel:

> The inner segment of the tunnel, which runs about 44 m long, has a course totally different in nature from that of the other parts of the tunnel, pointing to the fact that the tunnel followed a preconceived plan after all. In this short segment, the tunnel makes several sharp turns, which include several short dead-ends. These frequent changes in direction made by the miners, who worked from both sides, show clearly that they were aware that they were approaching one another, and they were trying to establish contact with the other side. Obviously, the existence of a natural continuous karstic crevice of dissolved limestone would have made the encounter easy and immediate. The sharp changes in course and the dead-ends point clearly to the contrary, namely, that such a continuous crevice was not available and the miners were feeling their way through the rock.[9.]

Reich and Shukron concluded that the course of the tunnel, although circuitous, reflects an original plan, but "a comprehensive explanation of the way the tunnel was planned and cut is still a desideratum."[10.]

Avram Faust offered the theory that the miners found and followed a karstic crack at the lower end of the tunnel. He bases this hypothesis on the fact that the height of the tunnel increases in its last section. While the floor of the tunnel maintains its gentle slope, the ceiling becomes increasingly high. Faust speculated that the miners followed a crevice at this point and only later had to deepen the tunnel to maintain its downward slope.[11.] The possibility of this theory is supported by Yigal Shiloh's data on the height of the tunnel, which increases from an average height of 2m. to nearly 5m. at its southernmost end. Shiloh also offered some interesting data on just how

"gentle" the slope of the tunnel is:

> The survey of the current archaeological expedition revealed that - in contrast to all that has been previously published - the difference in height between the beginning of the channel at the spring and the end of the tunnel is only about 30 cm. (a gradient of only 0.6%).[12]

There has been no shortage of theories offered to explain the course of the tunnel. An older hypothesis explained the route of the tunnel as an attempt to avoid royal tombs that were situated under the city. In fact, some tombs were discovered in the vicinity of the large southern loop of the tunnel.[13.] Raymond Weill contended that this scenario is not likely, and favored a topographical explanation for the tunnel's course. In a very impressive analysis, Weill demonstrated how the course of each segment of the tunnel can be explained in terms of the topography of the area. The tunnel seems to follow the contours of the land in such a way that the miners' progress could be gauged and directed by a crew on the surface, either by audible signals or window holes.[14.] Ronny Reich observed the importance of one datum that Weill provided, namely, that the tunnel crosses under the Siloam channel[15.] twice and seems to follow the general course of the channel in its midsection. This, along with the fact that the tunnel is less than a metre below the channel, led Reich to conclude that the miners may have somehow used the channel as a guide.[16.] Such theories abound, but ultimately researchers are still puzzled by the course of the tunnel and amazed by the ability of ancient miners to plan and execute such a project.

In recent scholarship, the date of the tunnel's construction has become the subject of controversy. In a 1996 article, John Rogerson and Philip R. Davies argued that the tunnel should be dated to the Hasmonean period.[17.] They contend that the pool of Siloam was not within the city walls at the time of Hezekiah, and thus the tunnel would not have secured the city's water source in the 8th century BC. In support of this hypothesis, they point out that no Iron II relics have been found in the south-eastern area near the pool of Siloam, suggesting that it was not within the city walls during Hezekiah's time. In this theory, an earlier water system, known as Warren's Shaft, would have supplied the city's water around the time of Hezekiah, making the construction of another tunnel superfluous. They conclude:

> While at present the line of the Hasmonean wall cannot be fully reconstructed, it is only in the time of the Hasmoneans that we can say the pool (of Siloam) was *very probably* inside the wall while the spring and (Warren's) shaft were both *definitely outside*. This period is therefore the most probable time of construction of the tunnel, and until there is evidence to the contrary, it is reasonable to accept such a date.[18.]

Not surprisingly, this conclusion drew fire from other scholars. Jane M. Cahill mustered evidence that the Tyropoeon Valley, in which lies the pool of

Siloam, has yielded Iron II relics that firmly suggest this area was both occupied and fortified.[19] Such evidence strongly favors an Iron II wall that encompassed the pool.[20] As for Warren's shaft making the construction of another tunnel superfluous in Hezekiah's time, Cahill argued that the shaft provided no means of capturing and storing the excess water that flowed intermittently from Gihon. The tunnel, she observes, does this quite well, and would have been a strategic necessity in time of war.[21]

Stig Norin offered a different solution to this controversy, contending that the location of the wall during Hezekiah's time is not so important to the dating of the tunnel. Norin asserts that the purpose of the tunnel was not to bring water into the city but to drain the overflow of the Gihon, thus preventing the excess of water from running down the Kidron Valley and revealing the spring to the enemy.[22] Norin maintains that Warren's shaft could well have been the main water source for the city, but that Hezekiah was still most likely responsible for the tunnel. This view is given some credence by II Chronicles 32:4, 30, which talks about Hezekiah's men blocking the springs in the land and closing the outlet of the waters of Gihon. Norin's view is that the purpose of the tunnel was simply to conceal or block access to the Gihon spring.

In the last few years, more definitive scientific evidence has enabled scholars to firmly date the tunnel to the time of Hezekiah. Marking the first time that a structure mentioned in the Bible has been dated radiometrically, scientists used carbon-14 dating techniques to determine that the tunnel was indeed constructed about 700 BC.[23] In 2003 their findings were summarized in *Biblical Archaeological Review*:

> Israeli scientists carrying out carbon-14 analysis on wood, coal and ash found in the plaster walls of Jerusalem's ancient Siloam Tunnel, and running isotopic tests on the uranium and thorium present in stalactites on the tunnel's ceiling, have determined that the tunnel was hewn around 700 B.C. - corroborating the Bible.[24]

While scientific analysis has given such firm information on the age of the tunnel, many unanswered questions still remain. Why the miners took such a circuitous course over a distance of 1,749 feet is still a mystery, and the ability of two crews to meet successfully underground is one of the marvels of ancient engineering. Hezekiah's Tunnel is still one of the most intriguing ancient structures that has been discovered in Israel.

The inscription

Hezekiah's Tunnel owes no small part of its fascination to an inscription found within it in 1880. As mentioned earlier in this paper, a young boy discovered it by accident while exploring the source of the pool of Siloam, where he and a few friends were playing. He reported the inscription to his

teacher, Conrad Schick, who retraced the boy's steps and found that the wall of the tunnel had a smoothed area where six lines of ancient Hebrew text were inscribed. Schick reported the find to the academic community, and shortly thereafter Professor A. H. Sayce copied and made casts of the inscription. The first part of it was missing, but what remained was translated thus:

> …when the tunnel was driven through. And this was the way in which it was cut through: While…were still…axes, each man toward his fellow, and while there were still three cubits to be cut through, there was heard the voice of a man calling to his fellow, for there was an overlap in the rock on the right and on the left. And when the tunnel was driven through, the quarrymen hewed the rock, each man toward his fellow, axe against axe; and the water flowed from the spring toward the reservoir for 1,200 cubits, and the height of the rock above the heads of the quarrymen was 100 cubits.[25.]

Ten years after the discovery of the inscription, it was carved out of the tunnel wall (and broken in the process) by a vandal. It was later found in the possession of a Greek citizen in Jerusalem who claimed that he had bought it from a stranger. Turkish officials confiscated the inscription and sent it to a museum in Istanbul, where it remains to this day.[26.]

This inscription is extraordinary in several ways. Unlike royal inscriptions, which name the reigning monarch and report his accomplishments in a flattering fashion, the Siloam inscription is rather unceremonious. It is told from the viewpoint of the workers, meant only to commemorate their successful labor. It contains no names or dates, but simply records a job well done by anonymous workers. Simon B. Parker describes it this way:

> It reflects an emotional engagement in the outcome and a sense of pride in the success of an exceptional technical achievement. There is no trace here of the public piety or political propaganda that one might expect of the monarch who sponsored the undertaking…The Bible recounts the official story of this extraordinary tunnel; the inscription in the tunnel preserves the unofficial version by a leading participant in the actual project.[27.]

That "emotional engagement" can be sensed as the inscription recounts two dramatic moments, both of which begin with temporal clauses. The first dramatic moment is when the workers could hear each other through the rock: "…and while there were still three cubits to be cut through, there was heard the voice of a man calling to his fellow…" The climactic moment was when the breakthrough was accomplished: "…when the tunnel was driven through…the water flowed from the spring toward the reservoir…" These two particular moments are recounted with the sense of excitement of one involved with the work.

Like the tunnel in which it was found, the Siloam inscription has been a

recent subject of controversy. The inscription is written in paleo-Hebrew script, which has long been taken as evidence of its early origin. Rogerson and Davies have marshaled other evidence that they say casts doubt on an 8th century date for the inscription. They say,

> The fact is this: in the present state of our knowledge, it is frequently not possible to prove on paleographic evidence alone whether a text in paleo-Hebrew dates from, say, the eighth-seventh centuries or is Hasmonean or later."[28.]

In support of this argument they offer evidence in the form of paleo-Hebrew texts from the late Second Temple period which bear similarities to the Siloam inscription. For instance, they judge 4QpaleoExod^{m} from Qumran to have "impressive" similarities with the Siloam inscription, saying, "there is not one single text that has as many similarities with the Siloam script as 4QpaleoExod^{m}."[29] They further contend that the dissimilarity between most other Hasmonean texts and the Siloam text only illustrates the diversity of this revived archaic script in the Hasmonean era. In terms of linguistic features, Rogerson and Davies note the use of *waw* in the Siloam text to mark possession in the third person masculine, whereas other pre-Exilic scripts use a final *he*. This, they contend, along with the use of *matres lectionis*, point to a later linguistic style. With this evidence they laid down the following challenge: "The burden of proof is on defenders of the Iron II dating to *prove the impossibility of a late Second Temple dating*…It does not suffice to claim that the script *can fit an Iron II sequence*."[30.]

Several eminent scholars rose to this challenge in an impressive article published in 1997 in *Biblical Archaeological Review*.[31.] The article, entitled "Defusing Pseudo-Scholarship: The Siloam Inscription Ain't Hasmonean," begins with a decisive argument by Jo Ann Hackett on the ancient orthography of the Siloam inscription. She points out that spelling of the Hebrew words for "man," "three," and "cubit," in the Siloam inscription do not fit at all with second century orthography. As for the use of *waw* as a third person masculine suffix, Hackett argues that this is not conclusive in the Siloam inscription. She contends that there is only one clear instance of the posessive *waw* in the inscription and it is suffixed to an irregular word, making it a poor example.[32.]

In the same article, Frank Cross likens Rogerson and Davies, who are not trained paleographers, to tone-deaf musicians trying to conduct an orchestra! Cross refutes their argument with a visual comparison between the Old Hebrew script of the Siloam inscription and the paleo-Hebrew script of 11QLev found at Qumran. There are clear differences in the formation of the *alef, he, kaf, lamed, mem, tsade* and *qof*. The difference in the formation of the *mem* is striking. Cross comments:

> The *mem*'s of Siloam and of the paleo-Hebrew scripts could not be more different in how they are made (and look). How letters are made drives typological change. If the manner in which a letter is penned changes, it signals a change in form. The Siloam form is made with two ticks…(and) is well known in pre-Exilic scripts. The late paleo-Hebrew *mem* is written with a zig-zag horizontal, the pen not being lifted.[33]

Complementing the findings of Cross, Ada Yardeni continues the article by examining the features of Hasmonean era paleo-Hebrew. She concludes that the paleo-Hebrew of Hasmonean coins and several Dead Sea Scrolls reflects an archaized script which no trained paleographer would confuse with an authentic Iron II script.

> If the Siloam inscription were inscribed in the Hasmonean period, its script would reveal a late stage of evolution (like the paleo-Hebrew scrolls) or artificial archaized characteristics (like Hasmonean coins). It displays neither."[34]

This impressive article, which also includes portions by P. Kyle McCarter, Andre Lemaire and Esther Eshel, does quite a bit to dispel the notion that the Siloam inscription may be dated in the Second Temple period.

In another article, Stig Norin took on the issue of the supposed use of *matres lectionis* in the Siloam text. There are two alleged instances of this in the text, but Norin points out that they could possibly be uncontracted diphthongs.[35] Norin goes on to cite the many examples of *scriptio defectiva* in the Siloam text, that is, shorter forms without the use of *matres lectionis*. Norin's analysis seems to indicate that Rogerson and Davies were rather choosy with the evidence. Although there are two possible instances of *matres lectionis*, they are not a common feature of the Siloam text. The orthography of the text leans heavily toward a pre-Exilic date. Ronald Hendel further demonstrated the Iron II characteristics of the inscription with a helpful comparison of several ancient scripts in his article entitled "The Date of the Siloam Inscription: A Rejoinder to Rogerson and Davies."[36]

Conclusion

The general consensus at present seems to be that we can confidently date the tunnel and the inscription to the time of Hezekiah. This being the case, James Pritchard well summarized the significance of the tunnel:

> The Siloam tunnel with its inscription in good biblical Hebrew is one of the most trustworthy links between archaeological discovery in Palestine and history recorded in the Old Testament."[37]

Such a link between text and artifact is rewarding to the archaeologist and

biblical scholar alike. But beyond the satisfaction of validating the text, the tunnel and the inscription can be appreciated for what they are in themselves. Hezekiah's tunnel is a monument to ancient ingenuity and resourcefulness. It is clear that Raymond Weill appreciated the tunnel in this way, judging by his dramatic vision of the miners' work:

> In these really inconvenient conditions, not knowing how to orient themselves and not conceiving that it could be done, what do the engineers resolve? In a confident spirit, of which the candor and bravery astound us, they decide that on each side the teams will first plunge into the mountain, and will then redirect themselves in parallel progress toward each other.[38]

Weill talks about the resolve, confidence, candor, and bravery of the miners. The Siloam inscription adds modesty to that list of virtues. The miners were content to remain anonymous, yet they clearly took pride in a job well done. The Siloam inscription reminds us that it is not just kings and warriors who make history. The common worker has his place, too. It is a delightful irony that one of the most important archaeological finds from the biblical era commemorates and memorializes the anonymous work of a crew of common laborers, and the small part they played in the Lord's purpose to defend Jerusalem.

Notes

1. James B. Pritchard, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1958), p.37.
2. Cited in Pritchard, *Archaeology*, p.37.
3. George Livingstone Robinson, *The Bearing of Archaeology on the Old Testament* (New York: American Tract Society, 1941), p.171-172.
4. Pritchard, *Archaeology*, p.41-42.
5. Avraham Faust, "A Note on Hezekiah's Tunnel and the Siloam Inscription," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 90 (Sept. 2000), p.4.
6. A karstic crevice is a space in limestone rock that is created by groundwater erosion.
7. D. Gill, "Subterranean Waterworks of Biblical Jerusalem: Adaptation of a Karst System," *Science* 245 (1991), p.1467-71.
8. Dan Gill, "The Geology of the City of David and its Ancient Subterranean Waterworks," *Qedem*, City of David IV, no. 35 (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1996), p.20, 22.
9. Ronny Reich and Eli Shukron, "Reconsidering the Karstic Theory as an Explanation to the Cutting of Hezekiah's Tunnel in Jerusalem," *Bulletin of American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 325 (2002), p.77.
10. Reich and Shukron, "Reconsidering", p.78.
11. Faust, "A Note", p.5.
12. Yigal Shiloh, *Qedem*, City of David I, no. 19 (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem1984), p.23. This is quite a difference from Parker's initial estimate, which placed the slope of the tunnel at 7 feet 2 inches.

13. Raymond Weill and L.H. Vincent, *The City of David: Revisiting Early Excavations*, Hershel Shanks, ed., notes and comments by Ronny Reich (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2004), p.59, 62-64.
14. Weill and Vincent, *The City of David*, p.57-62.
15. An above ground water system that predates Hezekiah's Tunnel.
16. Weill and Vincent, *The City of* David, p.147.
17. John Rogerson and Philip R. Davies, "Was the Siloam Tunnel Built by Hezekiah?" *Biblical Archaeologist* 59 (1996), p.138-149.
18. Rogerson and Davies, "Was the Siloam Tunnel Built by Hezekiah?", p.141.
19. Jane M. Cahill, "Arti-Facts: A Rejoinder to 'Was the Siloam Tunnel Built by Hezekiah?'" *Biblical Archaeologist* 60 (1997), p.184-185.
20. For a brief history of the debate over the walls of First Temple Jerusalem see Nahman Avignad, *Discovering Jerusalem* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), p.27-31. Avignad asserts that the western hill, and therefore the pool of Siloam, "was indeed populated and encompassed by a city wall in the period of the First Temple" (p. 31).
21. Cahill, "Arti-facts", p.184.
22. Stig Norin, "The Age of the Siloam Inscription and Hezekiah's Tunnel," *Vetus Testamentum* 48, no. 1 (Jan 1998), p.37-48.
23. "Jerusalem Tunnel Dates to King Hezekiah," *Christian Century*, vol. 120, issue 20 (10/4/2003), p.16.
24. "King Hezekiah Did Build the Tunnel," *Biblical Archaeological Review* 29, no. 6 (Nov/Dec 2003), p.18.
25. *ANET*, p.321.
26. Pritchard, *Archaeology*, p.40.
27. Simon B. Parker, "Siloam Inscription Memorializes Engineering Achievement," *Biblical Archaeological Review* 20 (Jl/Aug 1994), p.38.
28. Rogerson and Davies, "Was the Siloam Tunnel Built by Hezekiah?", p.146.
29. Rogerson and Davies, "Was the Siloam Tunnel Built by Hezekiah?", p.146.
30. Rogerson and Davies, "Was the Siloam Tunnel Built by Hezekiah?", p.147. It seems rather odd that Rogerson and Davies would say that the proponents of an Iron II date must prove the impossibility of a late Second Temple date. Their article only demonstrates the possibility of a Second Temple date, and does not really prove the impossibility of an Iron II date. It seems as though Rogerson and Davies are holding their critics to a higher standard of proof.
31. Jo Ann Hackett, *et al*., "Defusing Pseudo-Scholarship: The Siloam Inscription Ain't Hasmonean," *Biblical Archaeological Review* 23 (Mar.-Apr. 1997), p.41-50.
32. The Hebrew word in question ("friend") takes an odd form when the *waw* suffix is added. Also in this article, Avi Hurvitz analyzes this word as it is found in the Siloam text and concludes that it does not constitute evidence of a late form.
33. Hackett, et al., "Defusing", p.45.
34. Hackett, et al., "Defusing", p.47.
35. Stig Norin, "The Age of the Siloam Inscription and Hezekiah's Tunnel," *Vetus Testamentum* 48, no. 1 (Jan. 1998), p.46.
36. Ronald S. Hendel, "The Date of the Siloam Inscription: A Rejoinder to Rogerson and Davies," *Biblical Archaeologist* 59 (Dec 1996), p.237.
37. Pritchard, *Archaeology*, p.42.
38. Weill and Vincent, *The City of David*, p.61.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE JOSEPH NARRATIVE IN GENESIS 37 – 50

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The story of Joseph ranks among everyone's favourite Bible stories, containing, as it does, all the elements of good drama - betrayal, reversal and good fortune. It provides us with many lessons on living with integrity and in righteousness, and it reminds us, as Joseph points out at the end of the story, that what others can mean for our harm, God can intend for our good (Genesis 50:20).

Yet working, studying and preaching through the narrative raises many interesting questions. Why, for example, does the sordid tale of Judah in Genesis 38 interrupt the flow of the narrative, which would otherwise flow seamlessly? Is it Jacob's favouritism to the son of Rachel that causes the sibling rivalry at the outset? And how do we preach Christ from the narrative? Is it in the parallels between Joseph in his betrayal, abandonment and subsequent glory? Or is there some deeper principle at work?

Like every passage of Scripture, the Joseph material is set in a threefold context. There is the immediate context of its literary Genesisre (in this case historical narrative), which gives rise to the flow of the text as well as to the meaning of the vocabulary. Every text is a text in context.

There is then the canonical setting of the narrative in the book of the Bible in which it appears. There is a reason why the story occupies the latter third of the Genesis story, which takes us from Eden to Egypt, from creation to a coffin, from a good God creating a good world to a good man embalmed and lying in death. The book of origins explains the origin of sin and death in God's good world, and reminds us that evil has a point of entry in human experience.

Joseph's story as the vicegerent of Egypt parallels Adam's experience as the vicegerent of God; Adam was created in God's image with dominion over the work of God's hands (Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8:5). Their respective roles were very different, but the literary parallel is difficult to miss.

And the story also functions as a transitional seam to the book of Exodus, which begins where Genesis ends: with the children of Israel in Egypt. This subsequently creates a unit between Genesis and Exodus, the first of which begins with the garden Paradise in which the glory of God resided, and the second of which brings us to the domestication of God's glory within the tabernacle, replete with Edenic imagery.

But there is a third context: each text of Scripture is part of the complete revelation of Scripture, and is organically connected to every other part. Paul's analogy of the church as a body in which no part can exist in isolation from any other part is equally true of the Bible: no part of it is an island; it is all part of the main.

In that connection it is always useful to remember Geerhardus Vos's distinction between biblical theology and systematic theology: the former 'draws a line of development. Systematic Theology draws a circle'.[1] Biblical theology recognises the linear development and progression in redemptive history. The line has a beginning and an end, and every biblical event, as with every event in our own lives, has a definite point on it.

But systematic theology draws a circle round the whole, recognising that as one final and authoritative revelation from God, the Bible gives us God's view on every topic of life and reality. The Joseph story tells us much about the light of revelation in the age of the patriarchs, but it is rich in its disclosure of the theology of the Bible. It is about God as surely as it is about Joseph.

With that in mind, we can identify at least six strands of theology woven into the narrative of Genesis 37-50.

1. A Theology of Divine Proclamation

This is a narrative within God's Word about God's Word. The story is driven by dreams. Joseph is seventeen when we first meet him. We are told that Jacob loved him more than any of his sons (Genesis 37:3), but that is not so much what fuels the family rivalry. The inter-family strife is occasioned by the recounting of dreams. Joseph dreams of a harvest in which the sheaves of the brothers bow before his own sheaf, with its obvious implication that Joseph will be their lord and ruler. His mistake is to share what he has seen.

Knowing the end of the story we realise the significance of the remarkable question the brothers ask, 'Are you indeed to reign over us?' (Genesis 37:8). That is what drives the narrative, and is the point in which the narrative ultimately issues. They hate him even more 'for his dreams and for his words' (Genesis 37:8).

When Joseph subsequently dreams that the sun, moon and stars bowed to him, Joseph discloses that dream too. It is destined to seal his fate. This time even his father cannot stomach the disclosure, but the Bible does say that 'his father kept the saying in mind' (37:11), a detail very similar to Mary's pondering the words of other shepherds in her heart (Luke 2:19).

The dreams continue in the narrative. The first suggestion of the brothers is to 'kill the dreamer' (Genesis 37:19). The dreams of two prisoners eventually lead to Joseph's release, so that he can interpret the dreams of Pharaoh. All such interpretations, says Joseph, 'belong to God (40:8; 41:25).

But for Joseph these are not simply the effects of an over-stimulated imagination. They are a means of divine disclosure, the speaking of the God who communicated his will to the fathers in different ways and at different times (Hebrews 1:1). These dreams are part of the primitive organ of God's revelation. Among the primitive shadows of Genesis God is speaking, both in the disclosure of the dream and in its interpretation. This is further developed in prophetic books like Daniel.[2.]

As the narrative of Genesis unfolds, what is presented in the dream is what takes place in reality. It appears as a dream, therefore it is dismissed. The family justify their dismissal of Joseph because of his dreams, but his dreams become reality. The Word of God revealed in this way fuels the narrative and drives it forward.

In the story of Joseph, it is the Word that does the work. God has proclaimed what he intends to do in the history of this family, and reveals it to Joseph beforehand. The narrative begins with the telling of the story, with a prophetic element which underpins all that will take place. So much is the revelation of the Word of God at the heart of Joseph's story that the Psalmist can say that 'the word of the Lord tested him' in prison (Psalm 105:19). The great issue for Joseph's faith while in an Egyptian prison was whether in fact the promises of God would be realised.

The telling of the prophecy causes strife to escalate. The brothers reject Joseph precisely because he is a means through which God speaks. That too is repeated in the story of the Bible and the history of the church; the prophets of God are always the objects of scorn and rejection. At this level, nothing could be more relevant to the church in contemporary society than the Joseph story.

2. A Theology of Divine Presence

This is particularly highlighted in Genesis 39, where Joseph is brought down to Egypt. Potiphar has bought him, and we are told that 'the Lord was with Joseph' (Genesis 39:2). That is a prominent theme in the chapter. Potiphar saw that the Lord was with him (39:3), and was singularly blessed as a consequence. There is something very beautiful going on here, where the Egyptian knows blessing for the sake of the Israelite with whom God is present.

God is with Joseph as he resists the temptation of Potiphar's wife, in which he is relentlessly pursued. But he will not sin against God. Implicit in the narrative is the presence of God fortifying and guarding him. Then, when Joseph is imprisoned on a false charge, it is again explicitly stated that 'the Lord was with him' (39:23).

The appearance in the narrative of Joseph's cloak (Genesis 39:12-18) is interesting. In Genesis 37 the brothers dip Joseph's coat in blood, to convince Jacob that harm has befallen him. But now the unstained garment, which

speaks of his integrity and purity, is used to entrap him and imprison him falsely. To begin with he is thrown into a pit which the brothers ought to have avoided; now he is thrown into a prison which he could not avoid.

But God is with him and that is what makes the difference. God enables Joseph to succeed when everything else appears to be lost. In spite of the emotional cost to Joseph, from the horror of betrayal to the false accusation, from being the favoured son in a large family to being the forgotten slave of Potiphar's family, God is with him. It does not matter what he loses or where he is as long as God is with him.

That presence is ours in its fulness; no matter how our universe may convulse, God is with his church and she will not be moved (Psalm 46:5). As David puts it in Psalm 37:25, 'I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken'. The divine promise is of the divine presence (Matthew 28:20). The Joseph story is a reminder that in all things 'we are more than conquerors through him who loved us' (Romans 8:37).

3. A Theology of Divine Providence

If there is anything before us in the Joseph narrative it is the theology of divine providence. All the events here are remarkable providences: Ishmaelites passed by while the brothers were arguing over Joseph's fate, Potiphar decides to buy a slave, the butler and baker are thrown into the same prison as Joseph, Pharaoh cannot sleep...the list of remarkable circumstances in the narrative is endless.

When Joseph comes to interpret his own experience at last, it is to that point that he has recourse: 'it was not you who sent me here, but God' (Genesis 45:8). The whole thing is driven to the point where he says famously that God meant for good the things that others intended for harm. Joseph interprets his own circumstance in the light of God's Providence.

Calvin comments on Genesis 45 that,

> This is a remarkable passage, in which we are taught that the right course of events is never so disturbed by the depravity and wickedness of men but that God can direct them to a good end. We are also instructed in what manner and for what purpose we must consider the providence of God.[3.]

What follows in his commentary is a superb treatment of the doctrine, since in the narrative, according to Calvin, 'Joseph was a skilful interpreter of the providence of God'.[4.]

Not only is Joseph's interpretation of providence 'skilful'; it must be normative. This must be our view too. What are the key elements of our doctrine of Providence?

First, that providence is God's Providence. He is in absolute, direct superintendence of all the events in our lives. If we only had a blind, fatalistic notion of chance, we couldn't survive a day. But the fact that there is a God whose Providence is over all things means that there is a purpose to life and a comfort to God's people.

In her posthumously published memoir, journalist Kate Gross, writing on her experience of cancer, says that 'the universe is a random, arbitrary place. If there is a God, he sure isn't an interventionist who will cradle you in security all your life. He's as much in control as we are - not a b****- lot'.[5] This is a universe removed from the theology of the Joseph narrative, from which we derive the very opposite: a God-centred view of life that is under the control of Almighty God.

As Bavinck puts it, our doctrine of Providence 'is not a cosmological speculation, but a glorious confession of faith'.[6] When Joseph says, 'God sent me here', we are hearing a glorious confession of faith. Joseph bows before the sovereign will of God and improves his crisis in Egypt thereby.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, however, fleshes this out for us: 'in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the First Cause, all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly; yet, by the same providence, he ordereth them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently' (5.2). In other words, the things that appear to be chance events are the way they are because God is the First Cause. 'Contingently' is the idea that things might have happened and fallen out in any way; but the workings of the nature of all things is embraced within the decree of God's Providence.

It is not simply that God, as Open Theism has it, can conceive of all possible outcomes (by which ultimately he cannot know what is ahead); it is that God orders all things as the First Cause, and this is what causes things to work out as they do. We should not be afraid, for example, to use words like 'coincidence'. We believe in coincidence; 'coincidence' is simply two incidents occurring at the same time. What we do not believe in is *mere* coincidence; we do not believe in a coincidence unknown to God. We believe that God so orders all incidents so that sometimes two or more incidents occur at the same time. We believe in coincidence because God is the First Cause. It was a remarkable coincidence that Joseph was imprisoned in the same place and at the same time as the butler and the baker; but it was no mere coincidence. God is the First Cause.

But Providence itself is a kind of creating. God, who caused all things to come into being out of nothing, can also cause new things to come into being out of other things. And the something out of which he causes things to happen he himself orders. So the jealousy, the betrayal, the isolation of Joseph - these are all ordered by God, and out of that something, God, in his Providence,

creates something quite new and remarkable.

We need to capture this as we unfold the doctrine of providence in our preaching. God is always saying, 'Behold, I create a new thing'. Joseph certainly could not foresee what was going to happen in Egypt, but God could. The word 'providence' literally means 'to see beforehand'; but as Calvin says, Providence is much more about God's hand than about God's eye. It is about God working in history and experience than about foreseeing an outcome.

In his reflection on the past, Joseph does not ignore what his brothers did. He does emphasise, 'it was not you who sent me here' (45:8). But by saying this he is not denying the fact that it *was* by their hand that he was brought to Egypt. So much is Joseph absorbed in the thought of what God had done that it is as if they had done nothing at all. This method of God's acting, says Calvin, 'is secret, and far above our understanding.'[7]

It does not excuse the guilt of the brothers; Calvin emphasises that the effect of what Joseph's brothers did does not justify what they did:

> the deeds of men are not to be estimated according to the event, but according to the measure in which they may have failed in their duty, or may have attempted something contrary to the divine command, and may have gone beyond the bounds of their calling.[8]

Yet all the time, there is 'a wide distance between their wickedness and [God's] admirable judgement'.[9]

The God of Providence, who can bring good out of evil, does not thereby justify the evil by the good that comes out of it. The evil is acknowledged within God's Providence, but the distance between God's judgement in the case and the judgement of the brothers in the case.

There is, therefore, a presence of God in the wickedness of Joseph's brothers. It is not by bare permission that Providence works in this case. It is not simply that God permits the brothers to betray Joseph. There is a clear acting and 'working from moment to moment'[10] in God's Providence. In his almighty power God is both ruling over all and overruling all; his permitting evil is a positive acting within the scope of his decree.

Bavinck ends his discussion by saying that the doctrine of Providence saves us both from a 'superficial optimism' and a 'presumptuous pessimism'.[11] Our people can so easily fall into one or other of these extremes. We want our people to be optimistic for the right reasons; and the doctrine of Providence is always our guide in that respect.

4. A Theology of Divine Promise

By this I mean the specific messianic promise of Genesis 3:15, that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. That promise drives

this narrative and the entire metanarrative of Scripture. God promised that Satan would be defeated. How is that evident in the narrative of Joseph?

Some people look at Joseph as a type of Christ. There is much parallelism between the life of Joseph and the life of Christ that it is difficult not to go into that particular area of typology. There is the betrayal; pieces of silver are exchanged; there is humiliation followed by a kind of resurrection and exaltation; there is elevation to glory and subsequent administration; the government is on the shoulders of Joseph following his extraordinary rise.

But does this warrant a typology? There is certainly much evangelical mileage in the parallel; but I question whether there is typology, rightly understood. The paucity of references to Joseph in the New Testament is deliberate and telling. There is a reference to him in the testimony of Stephen in Acts 7:9-18, where the historical narrative is retold. There is a reference in Hebrews 11:22 to the faith of Joseph on his deathbed and there is an incidental reference to the number of the tribe of Joseph in Revelation 7:8.

Beyond that, however, the New Testament is silent on Joseph. But there is another character in the story who is just as significant: the character of Judah.

All typology is derived from the promise of a Saviour, an anointed One who would crush the head of the serpent. If things in the Old Testament are typological, it is because they derive their significance from the One who is the fulfilment of that promise. It is evident, says the New Testament, that our Lord was descended from Judah (Hebrews 7:14), not Joseph. Jesus is the lion of the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5). If, therefore, we are to do justice to the organic nature of revelation, we must do justice to the place of Judah in the Genesis narrative.

We are introduced to Judah as the fourth son of Jacob and Leah in Genesis 29:35 (with a summary in Genesis 35:23). The narrative of Genesis 37 begins with a conspiracy among the brothers, who hate Joseph. They plan to kill him, until Reuben, the firstborn, intervenes to spare Joseph's life (37:21). When the Ishmaelites appear, Judah suggests that Joseph should be sold: 'what profit is it if we kill our brother...let us sell him...for he is our brother' (37:26-7).

There is an irony and hypocrisy in these words. 'Let us sell him because he is our brother'!. That is not how brothers ought to be; it is unnatural. Yet Judah's intervention does preserve Joseph's life, and is one of the means by which Joseph is brought into Egypt.

Then we have Joseph sold as a slave, and eventually imprisoned, when the narrative is interrupted by the story of Judah in chapter 38. There he sleeps with his daughter-in-law. There is a literary contrast here: while Joseph is preserving his integrity and moral purity in the land of Egypt, Judah is back at home in Canaan prostituting himself with Tamar. And although we know that ultimately the Messiah will come from that union (Matthew 1:3), it is still a

sordid tale.

We then hear nothing of Judah until we hear that Joseph insists that Benjamin come to Egypt. The concession that Jacob made during the famine was that the brothers could go to Egypt except Benjamin, the full brother of Joseph and the youngest of the sons. Joseph tests his brothers, and brings them to the point where they confess that their youngest brother is with Jacob 'and one is no more' (Genesis 42:13).

Joseph insisted that Benjamin is brought to Egypt, so the brothers have no choice but to bring this news back to Jacob. The message nearly kills him (42:36); to lose Benjamin is proof that God is entirely against him. It is more than he can bear. Reuben proposes a solution: if anything happens to Benjamin his two sons will be forfeit (42:37).

But Judah's proposal is much more noble and moving: he will make himself the pledge of Benjamin's safety (43:9). The older version uses the word 'surety' here; Judah will be a guarantor, and will bear the blame if Benjamin is harmed. The idea is an interesting one; it appears in the narrative of Judah's sin in Genesis 38, where Tamar insisted that Judah leave a pledge with her (38:17), by which the proof of his sin is identified.

So now Judah, who left a pledge with Tamar, is himself a pledge to Jacob. That point is argued in Genesis 44, when Joseph further tests his brothers and Benjamin's life seems to be endangered. In the longest speech in Genesis, Judah argues passionately that he should be retained as a slave and Benjamin set free, concluding his speech with the stirring words, 'let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father' (Genesis 44:33-4).

This speech is what defeats Joseph: he can control himself no longer, and reveals his identity to his brothers. Judah's speaking is the catalyst. Fourteen times he mentions his father. He did not think of his father when he suggested that Joseph should be sold as a slave. But the Providences that have worked in the life of the family have left Judah concerned for his father.

There is something interesting going on in the characterisation of Judah at this point. We have watched Joseph taken away from home and thrown into Egyptian isolation, with Judah throwing all caution to the wind. But a sequence of trials, and Joseph's handling of the situation, has led to Judah articulating and confessing the sin of the brothers (Genesis 44:16), and pledging himself to save Benjamin.

Perhaps it is not, in fact, the case that the story of Judah interrupts the Joseph narrative in Genesis 38; may the reverse not be true? Does not the messianic foundation of Scripture warrant the conclusion that it is the narrative of Joseph that interrupts the story of Judah? This, in fact, is one of the most important keys to interpreting the narrative of Joseph. The story of Joseph is

the story of God's guardianship of the messianic promise: God will provide from the seed of the woman a Messiah. Who is the seed of the woman? There are many layers of application of that promise, but ultimately Christ is the seed of the woman, and it is by a series of discriminating providences that the seed of the woman ultimately comes. Abraham is chosen; of his sons, Isaac is chosen; of his children Jacob is loved; of his sons, Judah is the chosen vessel from whom the Lord comes.

So when he is on his deathbed Jacob delivers one of the most resounding messianic promises: 'The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples' (Genesis 49:10). A line of kings will come from Judah; historically the sceptre did not depart from Judah until the Messiah came. At the opening of the New Testament the sceptre is all but gone from Judah, but it does not depart until the Messiah appears, the King who rides into Jerusalem humble and riding on a donkey (Matthew 21:5). The sceptre of Judah belongs to Christ.

The ultimate reason that Joseph is in Egypt is to keep Judah alive, and thus ensure the continuance of the messianic purpose of God. Left to himself Judah would excommunicate and de-covenant himself, but where sin abounds in his life, grace abounds all the more (Romans 5:20). The brothers deal sinfully with Joseph, but God sent him ahead of the brothers (Psalm 105:17), and by Joseph's admission, that was to preserve many people alive (Genesis 45:7), the most important of whom was Judah, from whom the Messiah came.

The promise of the *protevangelium* is hanging on a thread when Judah throws himself into sin. But the promise is fulfilled through the preservation of Judah, and in the characterisation of Judah he is 'transformed from one who sells his brother as a slave to one who is willing to be the slave for his brother'.[12.]

When Judah comes to honour the pledge he makes to his father, he simply says 'Keep me, and let Benjamin go'. And although in chapter 38 I seem to see a Judah totally unlike Jesus, his greater Son, in chapter 44 I seem to hear the voice of his greater Son in Judah. Not to put too fine a point on it, is there a sense in which Jesus says, 'How can I go back to my Father if my people are not with me?' That is the pledge, the guarantee. That is what it means that Jesus is my Surety. He is sent into the world to do the will of his Father. That means that his life is bound up in the life of those for whom he has become the Surety.

We have a Judah-Jesus who will not return to Heaven without his people. He is the One who crushes the serpent, and thereby saves his people. Notwithstanding how like the first Judah we find ourselves to be, our hope is that our Saviour is the authentic Judah, the pledge of his people's safety.

There are many strands to this. When the nation divided after the death

of Solomon, for example, ten tribes formed the nation of Israel, but two tribes remained loyal to the house of David: Judah and Benjamin (1 Kings 12:21). Judah was always the pledge of Benjamin's safety, with all the Messianic strands of that history. That is the outcome of the Genesis narrative, in which Judah becomes the first person in Scripture 'who willingly offers his own life for another'.[13.]

There is the gospel in the Joseph narrative of Genesis. The messianic promise is worked out in the line of Judah, which is preserved by the position of Joseph.

5. A Theology of Divine Preservation

This runs through the narrative. Among the last words we hear from Joseph are in connection with Jacob's death. The brothers are afraid that Joseph's beneficence will turn to hatred. But Joseph assures them, 'God meant it for good...I will provide for you and your little ones' (Genesis 50:20-21).

Joseph is the provider through whom God will preserve his people. He is committed to his covenant family. There are times when we think that the covenant family is all but gone, and there is little hope left, but God provides for his people.

Arising out of the glory of the narrative is the promise of God: 'I will provide'. Joseph recognises that God put him where he put him for the security of the 'remnant' (Genesis 45:7), with all the subsequent revelation of the importance of the remnant. The emphasis is not on the smallness of the flock, but on God's pledge to give the remnant the kingdom.

6. A Theology of Divine Predestination

The final words of Joseph are a commandment about bones (Genesis 50:25), which is another remarkable expression of faith (Hebrews 11: 22). Joseph expresses his confidence that God will not leave his people in Egypt. He has a destiny for them in Canaan. Joseph believes that. He knows he is in Egypt at God's bidding; this is where God has brought them, but not where God intends to leave them.

God has a destiny for his people and it is not Egypt. Joseph's confidence is the fact that what God will do has been inscripturated in the promise of the covenant. Joseph's faith is grounded in God's oath - what he covenanted to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The covenant promised an enlargement of the covenant family, with a view to bringing God's people at last to the promised land.

It is in the light of this covenant promise that Joseph made a commandment about his bones. Even knowing that he was to fall asleep in

death in Egypt, with all the honours Egypt was poised to give him, Joseph died in faith, not having seen the fulfilment of the promises, and confessed he was a pilgrim. He wanted the removal of his bones as a testimony to his confidence in the ultimate hope of God's people that God will bring his people into the promised land.

In view of the totality of God's revelation, that is a confidence that God will ultimately transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:21). There is something, therefore, of the resurrection hope in the command of Joseph to take his bones out of Egypt. We must all go down into the Egypt of death unless Christ tarries; but our hope is that God will visit us and bring us out.

That is the ultimate act of providence: the transformation of our bodies. Better than the mummification of the body, which is the note on which the narrative of Genesis ends, is the resurrection of the body, which is the note to which the faith of Joseph ultimately points.

Notes

1. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996), p.16.
2. See, for example, the recent work by Greg Beale and Benjamin Gladd, *Hidden but now Revealed: A Biblical Theology of Mystery*, (Leicester: IVP, 2014), especially p.35ff.
3 John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, Vol 2, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), p.377.
4 John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, Vol 2, p.380.
5. Kate Gross, *Late Fragments*, (London:William Collins, 2015), p.146.
6. Hermann Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol 2: God and Creation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), p.594.
7. John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, Vol 2, p.378.
8. John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, Vol 2, p.379.
9. John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, Vol 2, p.379.
10. Hermann Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol 2: God and Creation*, p.605.
11. Hermann Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol 2: God and Creation*, p.618.
12. Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), p.567.
13. Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis*, p.567.

BOOK REVIEWS

Preaching Matters: Encountering the Living God,
Jonathan Lamb, InterVarsity Press, 2014, pbk, 187 pages, £9.99.

John Calvin, whose life and gifts were devoted to the glorious task of preaching, counselled those called to preach, 'The man who wishes to make himself useful in Christ's service must devote all his energies to maintaining the honour of his ministry'.

This challenge from Calvin is a reminder to preachers that they can never rest on their laurels; they can never presume that they know everything about preaching and have perfected the art of proclaiming God's Word. With that in mind, this book by Jonathan Lamb is an excellent publication not only to remind ministers of the priority of preaching in relation to their calling but also of the principles that undergird the faithful proclamation of God's Word.

From beginning to end, this book is written with the conviction that the Bible is the Living Word of the Living God and the only infallible rule of faith and practice. This is the premise that undergirds the entire book. It leads Lamb to make the assertion, 'When the Bible is faithfully and relevantly explained, it transforms understanding and attitudes, it challenges and reshapes world views and, most of all, it draws us into a living relationship with God through Christ.'

An interesting feature of the book is the use the author makes of the reading and preaching of God's Word by Ezra and the Levites in the days of Nehemiah (Neh. 8:1-12). Lamb uses this text as a model for the reading, preaching and hearing of God's Word. In fact his entire book is based on the principles that emerge from this passage.

The book is divided into three sections with three or four chapters in each. The section titles give an insight into the contents: the Word of God and the heart of preaching; the teacher and the work of preaching and the congregation and the purpose of preaching.

The first section sets some basic ground rules with respect to preaching. Preaching must be centred on God's Word, it must have a clear understanding of God's Word and prayer is absolutely necessary if the text is to be properly understood and relevantly applied to twenty-first century life. Lamb challenges his readers,

> 'There are no short cuts. Many other things will crowd in to exclude the study, prayer and meditation which good preaching requires. I have no doubt at all that this will be a constant challenge...But thoughtful, prayerful study is vital. The apostles soon discovered that many things distracted them from the priority of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:1-7), and that they needed to take action to ensure that first things were indeed first.'

In relation to the preacher and the work of preaching a very important chapter bears the title ‘Biblical preaching must be embodied’. Lamb means that the minister should be the living embodiment of his message. He draws our attention to the fact that Ezra the preacher was noted for his devotion to God’s law. "For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel." (Ezra 7:10) What Ezra taught he had lived out in practice and that was the secret of his lasting influence. With this in mind Lamb emphatically states that preachers must seek, by God's grace, to practice what they preach. He quotes Charles Simeon of Cambridge to good effect:

> ‘No amount of homiletical technique can compensate for the absence of a close personal walk with God. Unless he puts a new song in our mouth, even the most polished sermons will lack the sparkle of authenticity.’

A key chapter in the last section handles the matter of sermon application which Lamb calls ‘the art of preaching’. Preaching is not an end in itself. God's Word is proclaimed to bring about change; that sinners may be converted and God's people advanced in Christlikeness. Lamb draws his readers’ attention to the breadth of sermon application:

> ‘We long for his Word to comfort the distressed, to strengthen the weak, to confront the self-sufficient, to disturb the complacent, to guide the uncertain, to equip the disciple, to envision the church, to challenge society ... and so much more. The central need in all such pastoral preaching is to address the affections, to appeal to the heart, as well as to the mind and the will.’

This reviewer has been preaching for over forty years. He has found this book stimulating and refreshing. It has reminded him of many first principles of this glorious calling. This book is highly recommended to students for the ministry and also to seasoned veterans. We must always seek to excel in this vital task that God will be glorified and his kingdom advanced among men.

Robert McCollum

Dr Martin Lloyd-Jones and Evangelicals in Wales, Bala Ministers' Conference 1955-2014,
Eryl Davies, Bryntirion Press, 380 pages, pbk., 442 pages, £14.99.

Men who, as Paul says, are called ‘to preach the Word in season and out of season’ have been given a great privilege. Perhaps it is the greatest privilege any man can be given. However even such privileged men need to be encouraged. One of the means God uses to help his servants is through meeting

with one another in conference. This book is the story of one such conference.

The Conference itself grew out of fellowship meetings organized by evangelical Presbyterian ministers in Wales. It began its life formally in 1955 and in 1962 it moved to Bala, a small market town located within Snowdonia National Park. Since then the Conference has taken its name from its location. Initially the attendance was by invitation and though for the first few years Presbyterian ministers took the lead, the Conference itself has always been interdenominational. From the beginning, the doctrinal position was Calvinistic, though some of the men who attended were not of a mind theologically and so inevitably tensions did arise and a few withdrew.

Over the years men from other areas of the United Kingdom began to attend but the Conference did retain its Welsh flavour and so the book incidentally provides readers with an interesting insight into church life in Wales.

As the title indicates, Dr Martin Lloyd-Jones had a significant role in the Conference and attended almost every one from 1955 till 1978. There are fifteen appendices consisting of outline notes of the addresses he gave over those years. The notes were made by men who were present at the time. The topics covered are certainly intriguing, but readers may be frustrated at the inevitable gaps which these notes leave.

Between 1785 and 1904/05 Wales experienced the blessing of about sixteen periods of revival. In the light of this history it is not surprising that revival has been one of the most prominent themes addressed at the Conference. Indeed at one Conference the men agreed to covenant to pray for revival for one hour every Saturday evening. At times some expressed a concern that there was an over-emphasis on revival and felt this tended to romanticise the past and hinder the ordinary work of the present. However the Conference has stimulated prayer and has kept before the church at large a reminder of the blessings and fruits of revival which otherwise can easily be neglected.

One further challenge which the Conference brings to the church at large is the commitment to evangelism. Dealing with this topic members were prepared to ask themselves some searching questions such as, 'What does it mean to have a burden for unbelievers?' and 'Why are we not more motivated in seeking their conversion?'

The story of a ministers' conference may sound very limited and even esoteric. Certainly the appeal of the book will be primarily for men who are from Wales or currently ministering in Wales. However there is much in this volume to stimulate, encourage and challenge ministers of the Word wherever they are serving Christ.

The two final chapters gather much of the teaching which has been given at Bala on 'Word and Spirit' and this is particularly relevant to preachers. This

is borne out in the author's conclusion where he states that the Conference retained a strong emphasis on the Word and Spirit relationship and on the call for pastors to pray in dependence on God and to prepare well for preaching. These are surely matters about which the preacher can never think too often.

Knox Hyndman

Ruth, The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary,
James McKeown, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K., 2015, pbk., 152 pages, $22.00.

It is good to welcome excellent and stimulating scholarship from 'one of our own' in this land. James McKeown formerly taught Old Testament at Belfast Bible College for many years, an institution where he had first been taught Old Testament by Prof. H. J. Blair at a time when our College shared lectures there. He is now Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Union Theological College, Belfast, and has already written the 'Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary' on Genesis.

The 'Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary', with general editors J. Gordon McConville and Craig Bartholomew, promises to be a very useful tool for all who study and teach or preach the Old Testament. Its expressed aim is to 'bridge the existing gap between biblical studies and systematic theology'. Thus one half of each commentary offers detailed, section-by-section exegesis of the text, while the other half is given over to detailed theological implications of the text.

The bibliography shows that, in pursuit of these goals, Dr McKeown has read comprehensively over a wide range of contemporary scholarship of all shades (including Jewish and Feminist studies) with which he interacts. No disputed issue or apparent difficulty is left without thoughtful and insightful comment.

In the introduction he sets forth the purpose of the Book of Ruth as 'providing wonderful insight into the providential working of God in the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob…(showing) how faith in God sustained people in difficult circumstances and shaped their worldview…(as they sought) to understand and conduct their lives in the light of the purposes and providence of God'. However, he also talks about 'ambiguity' in the text – perhaps the word 'silence' would have been better – 'ambiguity' being such a loaded word to apply to Scripture.

After an excellent synopsis of the story line we are taken into an in-depth exposition of the text, in twenty sections. This is the part that will be of most use to expositors and, while we may not dot every 'i' and cross every 't', there is much that will help to illumine the text.

The 'theological' section that follows is in two parts. The first examines the significance of Ruth within the O.T. canon, in particular Genesis, Deuteronomy, Judges and Samuel. One disappointment for this reviewer is that, although this is followed by a section on the nature of the marriage of Ruth (in which he sides with current opinion that it was *not* a 'levirate' marriage), there is no consideration of the full biblical canon and where Christ, as our 'kinsman-redeemer' fits into the picture. We have to wait for this until near the end. This first theological section ends with a series of helpful character studies on Elimelech, Orpah, Ruth, Naomi, Boaz, 'the Supervisor', 'So-and-so' and God Himself. In the latter there is one worrying (unnecessary?) sentence (p.110): 'Some people will judge what happens to them in the light of their faith in the providence of God and others will judge daily events as purely coincidence. Just as life leaves us this choice, the book of Ruth leaves the reader to decide.' Yet his next sentence says, '…the book clearly presupposes that divine providence is at work…' (!).

The second part of the 'theological' section develops the theological themes that emerge from the book – Creation, Providence, Guidance, the 'Hiddenness' of God, the Land, Moab, Redemption, Universalism and 'Missiological' Significance. The section on Redemption was particularly welcome. However, it was with some surprise that we found in this part of the theological section a study of Feminism's take on the book. This could have been placed in an Appendix and more of a critique of its strident and unbalanced demands offered.

In spite of such caveats, however, we warmly recommend this volume – all except the unfortunate last line saying that the book's popularity and appeal lie 'in the fact that it is "an everyday story of country folk".' This throw-away line describes just what it is *not* (as he has shown in all that leads up to it)!

Norris Wilson

The Excellent Benjamin Keach, Austin Walker, Joshua Press, Second Revised Edition, 2015, pbk., 449 pages, £16.05.

The 17th century development of Christianity in England has been studied extensively, producing, among other writings, a host of biographies of leaders of the Church during that fascinating period. This volume, therefore, is particularly interesting as the first thorough account of the life and ministry of a significant leader of that time. Benjamin Keach was a prominent figure among the Particular Baptists and Austin Walker has produced a superb biography, interesting especially to Reformed Baptists today, but also to other believers.

Born in Buckinghamshire in 1640, Keach came to faith at the age of 15 and began to preach three years later. Eventually, being persecuted for his faith, he moved to London with his wife and three children in 1668. She died young and he married again, his second wife bearing another five daughters. He was ordained pastor of a church in Southwark which became the Metropolitan Tabernacle, two centuries later ministered to by Charles H Spurgeon. For 36 years he served Christ there until his death in 1704.

Benjamin Keach was an effective preacher, described as 'fervent and zealous', with many hearers converted and built up and several new churches planted. He gave himself to writing – sermons, poetry, apologetics and approximately 500 hymns. Regarding hymns in public worship, he led the controversy in a direction which many of us disagree with, and his *Spiritual Melody* of 1691 was an early hymn-book used in English congregations. He was a leading figure in shaping theological development of the Particular Baptists, as well as standing against various false doctrines.

As with every believer on earth, he had faults and weaknesses. His son-in-law commented that 'the vivacity of his temper sometimes exposed him to sharp and sudden fits of anger' (p.291). The author of this book interestingly summarises and balances some shortcomings: 'He was not as talented as John Bunyan in his imaginative gifts, or as capable as John Milton in his poetic abilities, and some of those limitations may be seen among the hymns that he composed. Nor was he endowed with the intellect and theological acumen of a man like John Owen. Nevertheless, he was a competent and well-read theologian who, at the same time, was aware of his limitations and dependence on others' (p.378).

In this thorough and fascinating biography Austin Walker invites us to learn more of his subject: 'Benjamin Keach was not a great man, as many would judge greatness, but he was a good man. He was consistent in his godliness, patient in his sufferings, conscientious and energetic as a preacher, pastor, writer and apologist. He was a faithful and a useful man, one who was pre-eminent among his Particular Baptist brethren, and who, during the last fifteen years of his life in particular, was highly respected in wider ecclesiastical circles' (ibid.).

Keach's life is worthy of such consideration and respect again today.

Edward Donnelly

Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation,
Kyle C. Strobel, Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013, pbk, 254 pages, £22.99.

Amid the plethora of books on Jonathan Edwards flowing from the presses, Kyle Strobel offers a comprehensive study of Edwards' theology

which will occasion discussion and, no doubt, controversy in the world of Edwards scholarship. Deep disagreements with a number of prominent Edwards experts are evident in this tightly argued work.

According to Strobel, Edwards formulated his theology around three key realities: his understanding of God's existence as he is in himself, God's work to create and consummate that creation and, finally, his vision of the Trinitarian work of redemption. The pattern of redemption is cyclical, beginning with the triune God and ultimately returning to him. In order to explicate this scheme, Strobel divides his study into three sections: Section One Edwards' Doctrine of the Trinity; Section Two Emanation to Consummation; Section Three Redemption as Remanation.

In Section One Strobel argues that Edwards' understanding of the Trinity is best described in terms of 'personal beatific delight' (Strobel's terminology). He believes that Edwards regarded *personhood* as the crucial delineation of the divine essence of the Trinity, and further claims that in the course of writing his key work on the Trinity, his *Discourse on the Trinity*, Edwards changed his view significantly. According to Strobel, although Edwards began with a version of the Augustinian approach to the Trinity (in terms of memory, understanding and will), he developed a distinctive position in which the attributes of personhood in God, namely understanding and will, in fact *become* persons, the Son and the Holy Spirit respectively, by virtue of the *perichoresis* that exists within the being of God. Even this brief summary will indicate that this is a complex argument, requiring a fairly good level of theological understanding on the reader's part, and it is undoubtedly one of the areas in Strobel's study which will provoke passionate debate. Many major Edwards scholars, such as Lee, Pauw and Danaher, are subjected to critique and, in Strobel's view found wanting, and they will certainly wish to reply.

In Section Two (Emanation to Consummation), Strobel seeks to show how Edwards' view of the Trinity in terms of personal beatific delight shapes his theology of redemption. The section consists of two chapters. Chapter 2, entitled 'The End For Which God Created the World', centres on a close reading of Edwards' treatise of the same name. Strobel aims to show that God's work of creation is profoundly trinitarian in nature, building on the position developed in chapter 1, and is the communication of God's inner life economically for his own glory. This economic existence is the *emanation* of God, his communicating his personal nature to his creation. As Strobel puts it, 'Redemption is the ground of creation, and all creation was created for God's own glorification' (p101). Chapter 3 ('Heaven Is a World of Love') is not, as readers might have expected, a consideration of the redemptive work of Christ, but rather, following the cyclical pattern expounded in chapter 1, it is a consideration of what Strobel calls *remanation*, God's action leading to the consummation of all things. Drawing extensively on Edwards' *Miscellanies*,

Strobel argues that he spoke of three eras in the history of heaven; from creation to Christ's ascension, from ascension to consummation and finally the consummation of all things. Among Edwards' distinctive ideas are his contention that the unfallen angels were not confirmed in holiness until Christ returned to heaven at his ascension and also a strong emphasis on heaven as a place of progress in the knowledge and love of God for the saints. Strobel also gives considerable attention to Edwards' trinitarian formulation of the beatific vision which the redeemed will enjoy in heaven. The vision will be *of Christ* (both physically and spiritually) and also *with Christ* as our Mediator, and it will be, in Edwards' unusual description, '*happifying*'. Strobel argues that Edwards' understanding of the beatific vision represents a significant advance even over Owen, especially in regard to the role of the Holy Spirit.

Section Three (Redemption as Remanation) is made up of three chapters. The first considers spiritual knowledge, the result of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit and mediated by Christ. Edwards describes spiritual knowledge both in this life and in heaven in the language of *sight*, so that there is a gradual progression in knowledge rather than a sharp break between heaven and earth. The following chapter is entitled 'Regeneration' and deals with Edwards' understanding of the work of the Spirit in terms of illumination and infusion. The Spirit acts in the soul as the *Holy* Spirit, functioning in the regenerate as a principle of holiness and love. To redeem the elect, God by the Spirit enables them to know and love him in a way similar to the way he knows and loves himself. In chapter six ('Religious Affection as Remanation unto Glory') Strobel completes the circular pattern of redemption which he outlined at the beginning of his study. In dealing with the religious affections, Edwards stresses that these are not a matter of mere speculative knowledge but involve feelings and delight as the regenerate will perpetually behold God's glory and enjoy his love, mirroring God's processions of understanding and willing which are the Son and the Holy Spirit. In an Appendix entitled 'Divine Attributes and Essence' Strobel examines some of the more arcane aspects of Edwards' understanding of God as trinity, in dialogue particularly with Stephen Holmes and Oliver Crisp.

This is undoubtedly an important study of Edwards' theology, one which makes demanding reading and which will occasion vigorous debate within the world of Edwards' scholarship. Strobel's disagreements with leading Edwards scholars, plainly stated, will provoke spirited replies. For those with the necessary training, this is a significant reading.

David McKay

BOOK NOTICES

Confessing the Faith: A reader's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chad Van Dixhoorn, Banner of Truth Trust, 2014, hbk., 484 pages, £12.00.

Here is a superb encouragement towards more fully understanding and applying the historic Confession held by Reformed churches for what is now approaching five centuries. The original text, together with a slightly revised modern version, is printed in its thirty-three chapters, every one then divided into sections, each accompanied by several paragraphs clarifying historical context, commenting on the text and pointing out how it is relevant for life today. Ten minutes for a section in daily quiet time can finish the book in something under four months. Personally, I have enjoyed and been benefited by this. As the foreword remarks, "This book is learned, but it is also accessible, the fruit of immense and intense study but also of a deep love for God's people".

Ted Donnelly

Dictionary of Daily Life in Biblical and Post-Biblical Antiquity (Vol. I, A-Da), Edwin M. Yamauchi and Marvin R. Wilson, Hendrickson (Distributed by Alban Books), 2014, pbk., 400 pages, £16.99.

Gaining a clearer understanding of the cultural context of the Bible is not just a matter of historical curiosity, as Kenneth Bailey has demonstrated in recent years with regard to the birth of Jesus in the 'stable', to name but one example. The more fully the reader of the Bible can enter into the world in which the first readers lived, the better equipped he will be to interpret the Scriptures correctly. To this end the *Dictionary of Daily Life in Biblical and Post-Biblical Antiquity* will be a great help in filling in the background of the Bible which was for the most part taken for granted by the writers of Scripture. What did ancient people eat and drink? How was Jesus dressed? In what kinds of homes did people live? At what age did people typically marry? Insight into these questions will shed light on all kinds of references in the Scriptures, and enable the preacher to paint a more vivid picture of the world of the Bible for his hearers. The *Dictionary* stands apart from other Bible dictionaries and encyclopaedias in that the entries are not restricted to words that appear in Scripture but on the Human Relations Area Files, which 'systematically and comparatively survey different aspects of culture, whether…highlighted in the Bible or not.' (p.1). So there are articles on, e.g., abortion, alcoholic beverages, athletics, banquets, celibacy, clothing and cosmetics. Each article deals with 6

different cultural settings: the OT, the NT, the Near Eastern world, the Greco-Roman world, the Jewish world and the Christian world. The author of each article also provides a useful bibliography of source material for the article and further reading. The finished project will comprise 3 volumes, and should be of great benefit not only to the scholar and preacher, but to any serious student or teacher of the Word.

Warren Peel

Psalms. From Suffering to Glory. Volume 1: Psalms 1-72 The Servant King, Philip Eveson, EP Books, 2014, pbk., 461 pages, £11.99.

Psalms. From Suffering to Glory. Volume 2: Psalms 73-150 God's Manual of Spirituality, Philip Eveson, EP Books, 2015, pbk., 524 pages, £11.99.

There are many commentaries on the Psalms available both for preachers and for Christian readers in general, but these two volumes by Welsh pastor and teacher Philip Eveson deserve attention. Each psalm is treated concisely yet thoroughly, with careful attention to the original language but done in a way which never parades the underlying scholarship. Those with a knowledge of Hebrew will want to engage with the Hebrew text for themselves, but Eveson offers the fruit of such study to a wide range of readers who do not have that facility. Each psalm is set in its original context and then sensitively related to its ultimate fulfilment in Christ. The structure of the psalms is carefully drawn out, yet the hand of a preacher is also evident in the presentation of the exposition. Rather than stitching together thoughts derived from other commentators, Eveson has done his own thinking and his treatment of the psalms is fresh and stimulating. These volumes will be a valuable resource for personal and group Bible study and, for preachers who have first wrestled with the original text for themselves, for expository preaching.

40 Questions about the Historical Jesus, C. Marvin Pate, Kregel Publications (Distributed by Alban Books), 2015, pbk., 407 pages, £12.99.

At the heart of the Christian faith is the person of Jesus and the work that he performed, but who really is Jesus? Much modern scholarship offers a bewildering range of answers to that question, and some of the more radical and sceptical ideas find their way via the media into popular consciousness. It is therefore essential that the biblical facts about the person and work of Jesus be set forth constantly, especially in response to the attacks of contemporary sceptics. The 40 questions covered by Marvin Pate address issues such as the various scholarly 'quests' for the historical Jesus, the biblical and extra-biblical

evidence regarding his life and teaching, the content of the Gospels, his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. Pate's approach is conservative, reflecting a high view of Scripture, including clear affirmations of substitutionary atonement and the bodily nature of Jesus' resurrection. He is thoroughly familiar with the ancient source material and also with the history of scholarly opinion on New Testament issues, both conservative and liberal. The book is not light reading, but offers a wealth of material that will strengthen faith and confirm confidence in the Scriptures, as well as providing ammunition for the defence of the biblical record.

Mapping Apologetics. Comparing Contemporary Approaches,
Brian K. Morley, IVP Academic, 2015, pbk., 377 pages, $25.00.

Apologetics – defending Christian truth from attack – is a vital discipline both to strengthen the faith of believers and also to confront unbelievers with the weaknesses of their own positions. Unfortunately there are numerous proposed methods for conducting apologetics, all claiming to be soundly biblical. The result is more often confusion rather than clarity. Brian Morley in this substantial volume offers a valuable roadmap to the contemporary apologetic scene which anyone interested in the subject will find helpful. After looking at introductory matters – apologetics in the Bible and a survey of apologetics in history - Morley in turn considers the various current approaches to apologetics among evangelicals. He examines Presuppositionalism (Van Til and John Frame), Reformed Epistemology (Alvin Plantinga), Combinationalism (Carnell, Lewis and Schaeffer), Classical Apologetics (Swinburne, Craig and Geisler) and Evidentialism (Montgomery and Habermas). Each chapter gives a comprehensive summary of the writer in question and is thoroughly documented, with the strengths and weaknesses of each approach identified. It is encouraging to read John Frame's endorsement of Morley's exposition of his work: '[he] shows a mastery of the details of my approach, including the qualifications and nuances.' In the final chapter ('Putting it all together'), Morley considers several key issues: faith and evidence, induction, fact and theory, and the mind's capabilities. For anyone concerned to grapple with the intricacies of apologetics, this is an important resource to inform and to stimulate critical thinking.

The Ecumenical Edwards. Jonathan Edwards and the Theologians,
edited by Kyle C. Strobel, Ashgate, 2015, hbk., 257 pages, £65.00.

Jonathan Edwards is one of the greatest theologians in the history of the Christian Church. He is often regarded as one of the quintessential Puritans, a

standard bearer for the Reformed tradition. His theology, however, is rich and, in places, complex, and has insights and implications that are increasingly being taken into account by theologians from various Christian traditions. This collection of essays draws on Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox thinkers who enter into conversation with particular aspects of Edwards' theology and assess its significance for their own tradition. Part 1 ('Comparison and Assessment') sets Edwards in conversation with a range of theologians and offers seven papers, including 'Seeking salvation: Jonathan Edwards and Nicholas Cabasilas on Life in Christ' by Orthodox theologian Alexis Torrance, 'Jonathan Edwards: "Discourse on the Trinity"' by Roman Catholic scholar Thomas Weinandy and 'Edwards and Luther on Free/Bound Will' by the Lutheran Robert Jenson. Part 2 ('Constructive Engagement for Current Conversations') seeks to apply insights from Edwards to constructive theological work in the future. The six papers in this section include 'Jonathan Edwards and Thomas Aquinas on Original Sin' by Matthew Levering and 'Jonathan Edwards, John Henry Newman and Karl Barth: Is a Typological View of Reality Legitimate?' by Gerald R. McDermott. This is a collection which offers striking insights into the implications of Edwards' theology for the wider theological enterprise, and will illuminate and challenge in equal measure: plenty to absorb and plenty with which to disagree.

A Treatise on True Theology, with the Life of Franciscus Junius, Franciscus Junius, translated by David C. Noe, introduced by Willem J. Van Asselt, Reformation Heritage Books, 2014, hbk., lii and 247 pages, $40.00.

The Reformed theology of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is often caricatured and written off as dry 'scholastic' speculation that owes more to philosophy than to the Bible. In recent years much good work has been done to correct such misrepresentations and to show the true nature of Reformed thought in this period. It is good, therefore, to have available for the first time in English translation the work of one of the key figures in this movement. *True Theology* by Franciscus Junius (1545-1602) deals with the nature of theology, its sources and structure, what is termed 'prolegomena', the matters that need to be settled before the various specific elements of theology are formulated. In particular Junius explains the vital distinction between 'archetypal' theology, which is God's unfathomable knowledge of himself, and 'ectypal' theology, the knowledge that God has chosen to reveal to his creatures. The ideas developed by Junius became part of the standard presentation of Reformed theology in succeeding years and *True Theology* shaped the minds of generations of theologians. Among other things, the book demonstrates that, at its best, Reformed Scholasticism was not a cold

rationalistic system, but an expression of a living, gracious relationship between God and his people. Although it may take readers a little time to become familiar with Junius' style and approach, *True Theology* is an important resource to have readily available. Willem Van Asselt's 'Introduction' sets out the historical context helpfully and makes the work considerably more accessible. The value of the volume is also enhanced by the inclusion of Junius' autobiography.

The Trinity and the Vindication of Christian Paradox. An Interpretation and Refinement of the Theological Apologetic of Cornelius Van Til, B.A. Bosserman, James Clarke and Co., 2015, pbk., 292 pages, £20.00.

Cornelius Van Til pioneered the approach to apologetics known as 'presuppositionalism', but he by no means said the last word on the subject. Many others have sought to take Van Til's insights and elaborate, recalibrate or correct them. One of the issues raised by Van Til is the question of paradox: how can apparent contradictions contained in the Christian faith avoid being fatal for the credibility of the Christian worldview? In response to objectors, Van Til developed an important distinction between paradox and genuine contradiction. It is Brant Bosserman's contention, however, that Van Til did not succeed in vindicating sufficiently the central Christian paradox of the doctrine of the Trinity – God's simultaneous threenesss and oneness. Bosserman attempts to formulate a unique proof that God can exist only as the pinnacle of unity-in-diversity and as the ground of a coherent Christian system if he exists as three, and only three, divine persons. Bosserman's study begins with the origins of Van Til's apologetic (considering Old Princeton, Old Amsterdam and Absolute Idealism). He then examines Van Til's orthodox Trinitarian system and proceeds to critique this system, particularly addressing the issue of paradox. The final part of the book provides, as Bosserman puts it, a Trinitarian vindication of Christian paradox. In the course of his study he interacts with a wide range of philosophers and theologians, including all the main figures who, in one way or another, may be counted as Van Til's 'descendants'. This is demanding reading (despite numerous diagrams throughout the text), best tackled by those with a good working knowledge of Van Til's thought, but it is a very significant study which will generate further consideration of a fundamental topic in theology and apologetics.

David McKay

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